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# THE CHOICE

A DIALOGUE TREATING OF  
MUTE INGLORIOUS ART

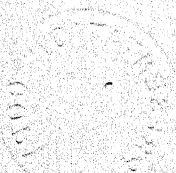
BY  
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## PREFACE

MOST things of earth are built up by the slow co-operation of agents infinitesimal; the tree by its roots and leaves, the river by its brooks, wealth by myriads of toiling hands, the body by its cells. So too with the things of mind. Laws and institutions, science and knowledge, rise like the coral insect's reef, by gradual accretion. Many generations of toilers contribute, till the fabric at last stands complete. Only here and there does genius in man, or cataclysm in Nature, hasten the work.

Ideas drift, like pollen, about the air: but often the breeze does not serve to waft them to their goal. Then there is need of living agents. The humblest insect, plunderer of ideas or honey, may light, laden with pillaged sweetness, upon a blossom still unfertilised, and touch the waiting germ to life, succeeding where a greater force has failed.



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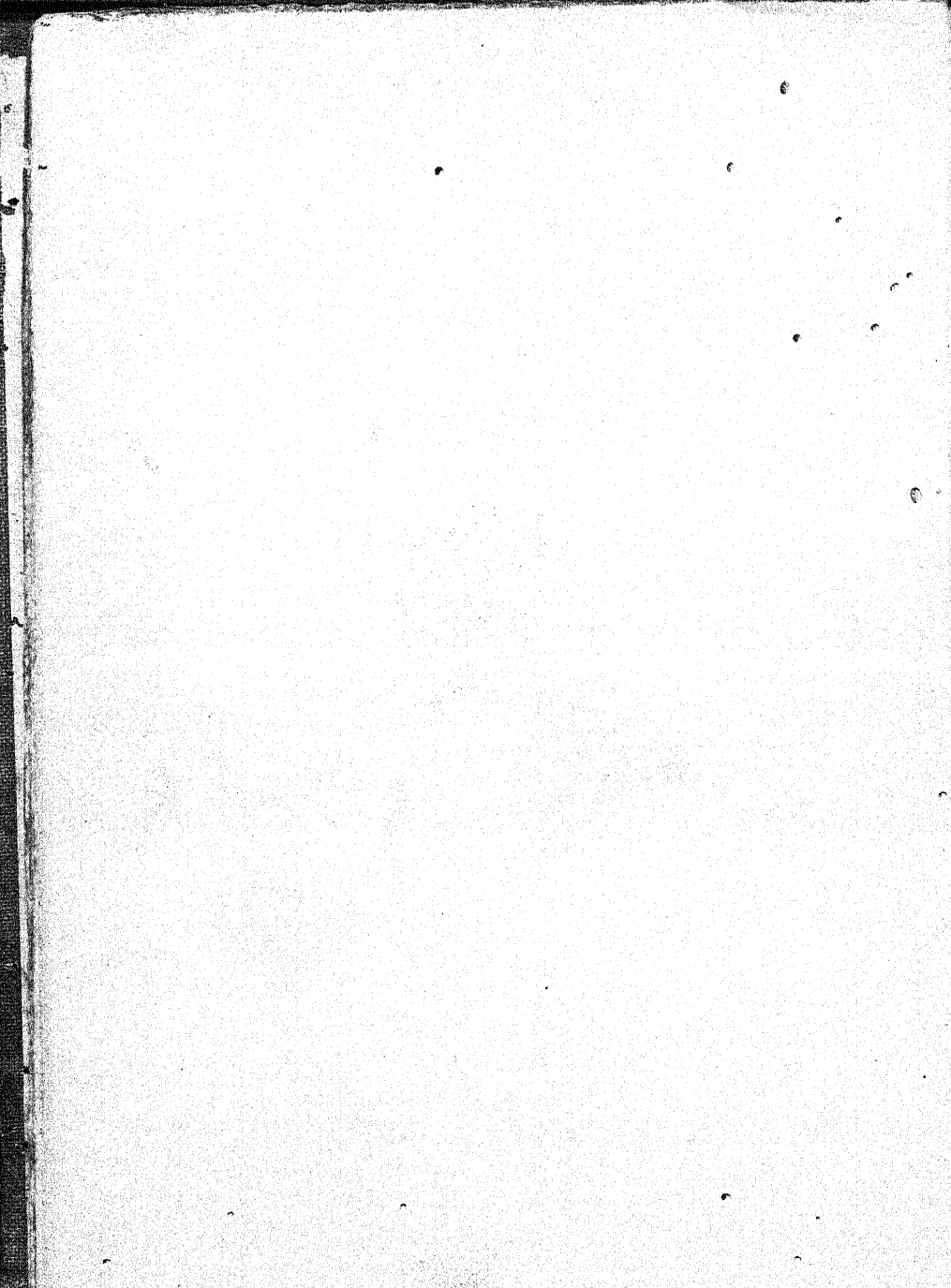
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"The world is full of woodmen who expel  
Love's gentle Dryads from the haunts of life,  
And vex the nightingales in every dell."

—*Shelley.*



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

WOULD there be room in the economy of the model state for the mediocre or unproductive worker in the fields of art, literature, or philosophy? The question had been the subject of a conversation to which I had listened at a country house, and had afterwards continued to occupy my thoughts.

The party was one whose selection had cost a discerning hostess considerable pains. The conditions to be satisfied were threefold. The guests were to be few enough to admit of general conversation; representative of divers callings; and, so far as might be, chosen in each from among the successful. Thus, a Minister of the Crown stood for politics; an eminent novelist for literature; a painter, already accounted illustrious, for the fine arts; and for music, a favourite pianist, rapidly making for himself a fresh name by composition.

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These were the protagonists. The two or three remaining members of the party, being lights of lower magnitude, were content with the rôle of chorus.

Success speaks with an authority and a knowledge of the world which makes its slightest utterance weigh. And in this instance the position of the speakers, as well as their unanimity, enhanced the interest of a well-worn theme. Circumstances were propitious for conversation; for the talkers were intimate enough to speak their mind freely; they were met together beneath a congenial roof, and were in the expansive mood which the moment of coffee and cigarettes proverbially begets. Nor was there any lack of good talk. The aforesaid discussion was only one of many, but it is necessary to refer to it at some length, since it is the prelude of all that is to follow. It sprang from the question: What becomes of the vast number of pictures which are every year produced and fail to find a purchaser? And thence, by an easy transition, arose the larger question of success and failure in the Arts.

The Minister, who started and led the talk, approached the matter from the standpoint of administration, and frankly deplored the ever-increasing number of unsuccessful devotees of Art. He saw in them much material of good citizen-

ship running to waste, which he would like to save for the State. He spoke deprecatingly, in the evident fear of uttering views unpalatable to his companions ; but, inasmuch as he had himself in earlier days made some mark in letters, his utterance came with twofold weight.

The dissent, if he had expected it, was not forthcoming. His remarks, extended to literature and music, as well as to the plastic arts, were endorsed by writer, musician, and painter in turn. One and all agreed in lamenting the outpouring of indifferent works of Art of which the world stood in no need. The result could only be physical want to their producers and those dependent on them ; and there was no gainsaying the consequent waste of material—good “*chair-à-Gouvernement*”—in mistaken and non-productive fields.

The discussion which ensued brought out the usual melancholy statistics. Each contributed from his experience evidence of the distress existing among the unsuccessful followers of his own craft—painters, sitting starving in the midst of their unsold canvases ; musicians, with unperformed symphonies in their pockets, glad to earn a few shillings in the orchestras of suburban theatres, or by precarious lessons ; authors, going the round of publishers with their dog-eared

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manuscripts ; children, unclothed and unfed, wives destitute ; and yet, with this evidence before their eyes, a never-ending stream of fresh aspirants cheerfully flocking to swell the list.

The Minister held strongly that no one with less than a certain very definite capacity should be allowed to enter the professions of art or literature or music. But, since want of appreciation did not act as a deterrent, how could control be exercised ? The State could not intervene. Every one, at least, with any influence, should exert it to the utmost to discourage would-be aspirants from choosing any of these callings.

No one demurred to this. The question of providing elsewhere for such an army of needy people was brushed aside rather impatiently. There was no lack of work to be done in the world ;—plain, humdrum, honest work, in banks and shops and offices, where they would be a thousand times better employed, and where they could be certain, in circumstances however modest, of supporting a wife and family.

Some one here suggested that a man who had deliberately chosen any form of Art as a profession must be presumed to have done so from a genuine conviction that this was his vocation ; whereas he would be a reluctant, and probably an indifferent bank clerk. Was it not better for a

man to fail at work which appealed to him, than to adopt as a *pis aller* and perform badly, work that was fundamentally distasteful?

This was met with a chorus of disapproval, in which the three artists joined emphatically. In the one case, it was urged, you get at least an efficient citizen; in the other, a useless and discontented being, capable of discharging his duty neither to his family nor to the state. Better than this the humblest routine by which a man can earn his daily bread and keep a roof over the head of his family. The meanest clerk, however machine-like the performance of his duties; the least-skilled manual labourer; were pronounced to be more desirable members of the community than a discontented supernumerary in some already overstocked field of Art.

The tide of conversation swung toward the growing tendency to evade the serious responsibilities of life, and seek escape from humdrum existence along the more romantic and seductive paths of Art. It might be that material prosperity in its progress had diminished the capacity for exertion; it might be to the spread of education, or the wane of religion that the evil was due; whatever the cause, the duties of ordinary citizenship seemed to grow distasteful. The rising generation were no longer content with the

monotony of regular pursuits in which they could earn a living and rear up families of competent citizens to succeed them ; they must have something better. Too good for the common tasks of humanity, they must be for ever pursuing phantom aims and ideals, luring them fatally on to the quicksands of waste and despair. The Minister saw in all this but one of the many signs of the times—of a piece with the love of amusement, the pursuit of wealth, and what sometimes seemed to him the surprising lack of ambition among the sons of the well-to-do who had received a Public School or University education. Life was too pleasant ; and whether or not it was true that a race which no longer needed to struggle was doomed, certain it was that Dilettantism was on the increase, and Dilettantism invariably meant the waning of those solid qualities that made States strong. “I have worked as hard as most people for Education,” he continued, “yet I fear it must be held responsible for much of this—perhaps inevitably, during its early stages at least. It illustrates anew the truth of the old adage about ‘a little knowledge.’ No sooner can we hold a pen than we discover that the art of bookmaking is nothing so very mysterious ; and we rush to immortalise ourselves in print. Our reading gives us countless instances of genius remaining obscure and unappreciated ;



and forthwith we, or admiring relatives for us, are prompt to discover evidence of yet one instance more in any poor vestige of artistic talent we may display. There is a terrible lack of humour about the whole business! we can so safely leave the world to discover its great men in due course. Like others they must make their way, and if it is slow at first, so much the better that they should have a stimulus to redoubled effort."

This and much more that was equally sound and sensible and convincing was said. The upshot was that the talkers were agreed in deploring the ever-increasing numbers of aspirants drawn to various walks of Art. In music and literature, as in painting and thought, the unprized, the unproductive, the ungifted must alike stand aside, and would do better to turn their talents elsewhere; Art could dispense with mediocrity. And those so ill-equipped as to fail to prove ability to live by it, must by every possible means be discouraged, if not excluded.

All this had taken time: and when finally the drawing-room was reached, the ladies were full of curiosity about the subject of a discussion which had so long outweighed the attraction of their company.

"We were deploring," said the Minister, "the craving for self-revelation which leads so many

excellent people nowadays to shrink from the duties of ordinary citizenship and give themselves up to some form of Art, which they practise with complete want of success, in the absence of all demand, and to the detriment both of themselves and the community. I have no doubt that every one in the room has at one time or another written a book, so that I must be careful of what I say. But I do honestly think that it is one of the most serious problems with which we are faced—this dabbling in Art instead of shouldering some definite burden in the world. See the sort of thing that happens every day. Here is a good concrete case, of which I heard only this morning. A man whom we all know has thrown up the public service, in which his prospects to my own knowledge were excellent, in some vague intention of devoting himself to study and literature, with no reason that I am aware of to expect any measure of success." The name which he gave appeared familiar to most of those present.

"But that isn't quite a case in point," one of the ladies objected. "Mr. — wrote himself to tell me of his decision. It is not a mere vague literary ambition in his case, but a deliberate purpose of achieving more than he could ever hope to in a profession which has always been distasteful to him, and for which thousands of

other people are equally well qualified." "Exactly," the other rejoined. "This is an admirable illustration of my remarks. He finds distasteful a profession in which he is serving his country, is fairly well paid, may look naturally to honours and advancement; and which thousands of men would feel proud to get their sons into. And why? because forsooth he has a certain amount of routine work to face and thinks himself intended by nature for 'better things.'"

The conversation now became more general, and the company split up into groups, so that there was no opportunity of pursuing the subject further; but it continued to occupy my thoughts, and lying awake that night I pondered over what had been said. The Minister's views were what the standpoint of practical statesmanship—and indeed ordinary common sense—must infallibly entail: with most of them I was in thorough agreement. But I marvelled that the three whose professions were in question had acquiesced so readily in the proposed wholesale extinction of their less happy colleagues. It was strange that when in the course of the conversation some one had timidly suggested that there might be more merit in failure at a congenial than in success at a distasteful calling, no single voice had been raised in support. Yet how in this more than in any

other career could the intermixture of failure and success be avoided? How could even genius be sure of appreciation? or how be certain of its gifts? Many and many a one had doubted up to the very moment of success. If Art is good, it must have its humble as well as its illustrious followers; its acolytes as well as its high priests; it must be content to resemble nature in the profusion of her handiwork, and see a million embryos of potential life perish that one perfect specimen may be evolved.

This man, too, who had been censured, was he not within his rights in exchanging one work for another that made a stronger appeal to him,—even if the work abandoned *were* the service of his country? Why, provided he did not become a burden to the community, was he not free to arrange his life as seemed good to him? But I knew too little about the circumstances to decide this; and the following day I sought out the lady who had spoken on his behalf and asked her to tell me more of him.

She at once offered to show me the letter of which she had spoken. "I did not say as much as I might have in his defence last night," she said, "because I knew that it would not have been much good. He is one of those unfortunate people with the mind of a poet, but without the poet's

power of expression : and there is nothing more irritating or less easily explainable to matter-of-fact people of the world."

The letter was as follows :

"I am exchanging an uncongenial for a congenial occupation," it ran. "If I wished an excuse for the step I am taking, I do not know that a better could be found. Had I stayed I might have been successful ; but there are many only too ready to fill my place, and better qualified. I am not giving up work ; only hoping to bring such powers as I possess to fuller development in another field. It is the imaginative side of life which has always most appealed to me ; and it is here also that the greatest need for workers seems to me to be. Imagination alone can unveil the spirit of beauty which hovers everywhere about us, lost and unheeded amid the dust and turmoil of existence, yet eager to be revealed to seeing eyes. Beside this revelation, of how little moment become all the petty questions of an hour that loom so big and cause such heated strivings ! If I could hope to open a few eyes to the wonders by which they are surrounded, I should have done something to justify my existence. If I could contribute even one ant-like effort to the spread of truth, could help any harassed soul to reflection, or cheer a single human being by opening out unsuspected vistas of hope

and beauty, I should account myself paid in better coin than could reward any official success."

Were these merely fine sentiments, cloaking the passage from a life of strenuous exertion to one of self-indulgent ease?—the pretext of a sickly soul for leaving the battle to seek an inglorious security—the pitiful excuses of a malingerer from life? or were they sincere and genuine—a philosopher putting his creed in practice—rising superior to ambition and worldly aims, in order, in obscurity, to seek for truth? What my companion knew of the case disposed me rather to the latter and more lenient view; but I was none the less perturbed by the unanimous verdict of a shrewd assemblage of men and women of the world.

I was interested enough to make further inquiries. It seemed that this man, who was still young, but was accounted of some promise, had not only left his profession, but had actually refused the offer of a very considerable advance in it—in fact that the imminence of this offer had precipitated his departure. His friend had ascribed to him a poet's nature without the corresponding gift of expression; but I found now that he had written and published a small volume of verse which had not entirely escaped notice.

## CHAPTER II

### PERPLEXITY

THE more I pondered upon the problem, the more complex did it become: for one question led to others, as each upward step brings new peaks into a climber's view.

The original enquiry as to the place of mediocrity in Art had revealed a whole series of others, subsidiary and underlying; not only did the significance of Art and its service to humanity come in question, but the right of the individual to do as he liked, or the extent to which his freedom of choice was limited by his obligations to the state.

And gradually, as I reflected on these problems, I came more and more clearly to see that on the answers given to them must hang any solution of the great fundamental mystery of all—the purpose of life.

I wondered at never having been led to ask myself what now came to seem so vital. Yet I could not remember that either in my home life or

in the course of school and university education, the problem had ever been raised for me in quite this form. Certainly it had not entered practically into the choice of my own profession. It was strange to me now that up to middle life I should have left such elementary words as freedom and obligation undefined and even uninvestigated. Not that the usual pious maxims for the guidance of life had not been duly and painstakingly inculcated in my boyhood ; but doubtless I had opposed to them the cheerful imperviousness of youth to any attempt to improve it ; to most boys, I suppose, such things carry a savour of the pulpit, and they probably seemed to have little or no connection with the facts of every-day existence. Looking back, at any rate, it seems to me that neither I, nor most of my contemporaries, were guided in the choice of our future life's work by any but purely material and practical considerations. How to "get on in the world" was the problem, uncomplicated by superfluous abstract considerations of ethics.

But now I felt like one standing upon the brink of a swift-flowing stream, along the banks of which, in company with vast crowds of others, I had been aimlessly but contentedly wandering, in the vague hope of reaching a destination, somewhere far ahead. And it had suddenly been borne



in on me that this destination lay upon the further bank, and that to reach it the stream must be crossed. Hardly less elementary than this was the change in point of view which my meditations had forced upon me.

The problems must be solved, and as yet I saw no trace of a solution. What had happened was that it had become difficult to carry on contentedly the rather aimless plan of life that had hitherto satisfied me amply. This inconvenient question of purpose was in fact threatening to overturn the comfort which existence from hand to mouth had somehow agreeably secured. The grain of mustard seed sown in a chance conversation had waxed to the dimensions not of a forest tree but of a forest.

There is a passage in which Emerson propounds the comfortable doctrine that our particular uncertainties and fears may safely be adjourned for solution to the sure revelation of time. "Oh, believe, as thou livest," he writes, "that every sound that is spoken over the round world, which thou oughtest to hear, will vibrate on thine ear! Every proverb, every book, every byword that belongs to thee for aid and comfort, shall surely come home through open or winding passages."

It is certain that when my uncertainty was at its height and my spirit most troubled, help reached

me from an unexpected quarter. What seemed a chance meeting at a common friend's, made me acquainted with the man whose case had set the train of thought in motion. Curiosity and interest combined emboldened me to make some sympathetic reference to his recent step, which led to exchange of franker speech than a first meeting usually warrants. I found him, like most people who have embarked upon a new and momentous venture, ready—indeed almost anxious—to talk of the matter uppermost in his mind: nor had I any cause to conceal my new-born interest in the questions which presumably lay at the root of his decision. This talk led to others; and our acquaintance soon ripened into friendship. It needed little persuasion to induce me to visit him at a cottage in one of the southern counties where he spent the summer months. And here, in the shade of a mighty beech-tree, our view bounded by the pure and sweeping outlines of the downs; or in many a ramble upon their close and springy turf, redolent of thyme and gorse; sung to by larks and yellow-hammers through the long June afternoon; we discoursed together on the mysteries of life.

From time to time, as my perplexities began to melt away, and question after question found its answer, I set down some notes of our talks. Though I use the plural word, it was throughout

my companion who bore the brunt of argument, my part being chiefly limited to objection and interrogation. It has seemed to me worth while to attempt to record the outlines of our discussion since they may help others whom the same perplexities have assailed.

## CHAPTER III

### FREEDOM

QUITE early in our talks, as soon as I felt that our intimacy warranted my doing so without impertinence, I referred directly to his own case, and broached the problems relating to freedom and duty which had been perplexing me.

"You tell me," I said, "that one of your chief inducements in leaving the public service was the desire for freedom. I readily grant the temptation—probably most men feel it to a greater or less extent. Having some independent means you were in a position to choose: but how far, from the standpoint of abstract ethics, are we free to do as we like? Did you feel no heartsearchings about leaving the service of the State in order to lead a life of your own selecting? Had you no sense of obligation? After all, though we take it as a matter of course, the State does a good deal for us. The world into which we find ourselves launched is a comfortable one. There is

but little fear of battle, murder, or sudden death. At every turn our lives are safeguarded by a marvellous and sleepless organisation which relieves us of much of the necessity for taking thought. We find ready made a complete system of communication, sanitation, transport, police, hygiene, defence, law, education, which laps us about with benevolent forethought, and reduces the anxieties of existence to a minimum. All this machinery of comfort and safety, to which we are so used that we take it for granted, is provided for us by the entity which we call the State. Are we to consider it as our due, more than required by the taxes to which we submit with so little alacrity? or do we owe something more besides?"

"It is evident," he answered, "that if we keep within the bounds of law, vote at elections, serve on juries, pay taxes, and refrain from being at charges to the community, we have performed the strict minimum legally required of the citizen. But I admit at once that in discharging this bare minimum we can hardly claim to have fulfilled any very high civic ideal. In fact, leaving aside for the moment the question of an higher ethical standpoint, the mere pressure of our neighbours' opinion exacts more from us. We are expected to identify ourselves with the various communities of which we form part; be they parish, county or

nation, university, profession, or merely club. We are expected to be interested in public administration, in foreign as well as internal questions ; to have, and fight for, political opinions ; to support praiseworthy causes ; to succour our poorer neighbours and dependants, to give of our abundance ; and generally to lead an orderly, human, self-respecting existence."

"But all this," I said, "directly or indirectly is a curtailment of our unrestrained liberty of action? If you accept it, you at once limit the freedom for which you are striving. I should like, before we get further, to hear what you really mean by freedom. Is it the right to do exactly as you please, or is it subordinate to obligations? And if the latter, where do they begin and end?"

"It sounds paradoxical," he answered, "but liberty, as I understand it, is built upon restrictions. Civilised communities are encompassed by a network of inhibitions. We may not leave the roads, or fire a gun in a public street, or appear without clothes, or throw our rubbish out of the window, or drive on the right-hand side of a lamp-post ; we may neither tell our neighbour home-truths to his face nor speak them of him behind his back ; nor, if he do so by us, may we requite it with personal violence. The fact is that the further we advance in civilisation, the more closely does this network

enmesh us. In Prussia one might almost say that the things permitted are fewer than those forbidden."

"But if," I said, "our boasted liberty is subject to such considerable curtailment, how is this compatible with the notion of personal freedom of which we are so proud?"

"I cannot attempt to explain the paradox unless you allow me to deliver myself at some length?" he answered.

I nodded assent, settling myself comfortably in my chair. The first hot day of June made the beech-tree's shade welcome. There was just breeze enough to lift the foliage in a faint soothing whisper. The scent of new-mown hay-fields drifted up to us in waves, accompanied by the intermittent tinkling sound of the machine; and I was rather in a mood to listen than to talk.

"The difficulty is one which, as you know, exercised eighteenth century thinkers considerably. There were many contemporaries of Rousseau to whom ideal freedom meant the absence of all restraint. It was a false, but not an unnatural, step forward, on the road towards emancipation which mankind had for centuries been slowly travelling. Throughout the middle ages man had acquiesced in regarding himself as the slave of institutions. The Sovereign, deriving his authority

from the Deity, was at first the unquestioned source of political power. Gradually the authority, while still embodied in the ruler, came to be transferred to the united wills of his subjects, and the contract entered into between ruler and ruled was held to be irrevocable.

“But this convention too, was to go the way of other articles of faith. Ere long the irrevocability of the contract came in question. And so it happened that man, instead of being any longer the slave of institutions, came to be regarded as their master—‘the ultimate end to which institutions are but means.’ It was tempting to step from this point to the position that the ideal state would enable the individual, without fear of interruption, to give his natural impulses fair play : institutions being but the machinery for bringing this about. Those who did so did not see that they were reversing the real order of things, and attempting to explain a higher phase of evolution by a lower ; since the freedom from restraint which they postulated as the *summum bonum* was a return to an earlier stage of man’s development. The significance of nature’s earlier steps will become clear only when the final steps have been taken ; the oak explains the acorn, not the acorn the oak. Liberty was thought of as prior and external to civilisation, instead of its highest result. The



untrammelled freedom of savagery was the ideal ; to the extent that the restrictions of organised life prevented the attainment of that ideal, this school of thought regarded them as artificial, and preached the duty of discarding them so far as possible. Such order as it was prepared to admit at all was to be merely for the purpose of preserving for man the spontaneity of his original impulses.

"These ideas may well have contributed to hasten the downfall of that avalanche which was so soon to overwhelm the old order ; but it evidently could not be long before their fallacy was detected. Inquirers after truth began to doubt whether the freedom of the savage was after all the ideal and enviable state which had been pictured.

"It was clearly incompatible with organised existence under institutions. As government became more democratic, so did it tend more and more to hedge the individual about with restrictions and regulations. Parliaments, for instance, showed an ever stronger tendency to encroach on fields heretofore regarded as purely private."

"Yet the liberty enjoyed under free institutions continues none the less to be the boast of all enlightened opinion, the professed aim underlying all social endeavours," I interrupted, "so the old dilemma still bars the way. Either this vaunted liberty is an illusion, or it is not incompatible with

a considerable amount of restraint. How is the apparent contradiction to be reconciled?"

"It is upon the latter horn that I must choose to impale myself," he answered.

"The ideal professedly aimed at by modern states is the highest possible development of the individual; but this is only possible in societies, not in isolation. The development of a Robinson Crusoe, permanently cut off from contact with his fellows, must necessarily fall far short of its highest potentialities. As part of a community, however, man must conform to the convenience of others, and surrender accordingly some of his own. In return he feels himself—and his better self—represented and supplemented by the Community. The Community is, as it were, a completer personality in which his own is not merely merged but strengthened. He is thus identified, but not co-extensive, with the state, which represents, indeed, potentially the best of which he is capable, but also represents much more; seeing that it performs the same office for every other of its members. And so, standing for the fuller self of all the individuals composing it (as a judge stands for the whole corpus of the law which he administers), the modern state comes to constitute a sort of universal rational will, working for the completest individual development of its members,

but with social good, and not the unrestrained spontaneity of the Ego, as its basis. It is thus no mere aggregate of persons or votes, but a living entity : no rabble, but an army trained and disciplined.

“Each member potentially has access to it in its completeness, and, like the judge administering the law, with the whole of which he cannot possibly be acquainted at any one moment, is potentially capable of becoming its mouthpiece. Thus social good may be said to represent the Self—the Self at its best. But in uniting with his fellows in aiming at a certain kind of life in which all may find well-being, it is clear that the individual will be called on for sacrifice ; and this sacrifice he may fail to recognise as the action through the organisation which is the State, of his own higher potential self. If he makes the sacrifice reluctantly, or resists, it is because he fails as yet to identify himself with the rational—that is the universal—will, which instead of including his own still appears to him to be in opposition to it. He resents the apparent interference with his liberty, lacking the insight to recognise that the higher moral freedom can be attained only by some surrender of the private self-centred will. For on the average we are of necessity ignorant, imperfect, and indolent ; it is only at moments

that we are at our best. But the State stands permanently for that best ; and, therefore, even if it has to exercise compulsion over the shortcomings of the private will, it does so as representing that will in its highest aspect. Our imperfect self, in other words, submits itself to government by our better potential self. For the State can command the services of all that is best in the minds of the individuals composing it ; it is thus, theoretically, always at its highest.

“For instance : if it is a question of jurisprudence, the judges responsible have behind them for their guidance the whole volume of the decisions recorded by their predecessors ; if fresh legislation is to be introduced, it is drafted in consultation with all the best expert knowledge, all the stored-up wisdom which no single individual could ever possess. Similarly the whole force of the State is exerted to safeguard the rights of the humblest of its members equally with those of the whole community. You can see now that even when it is necessary for the State to exercise compulsion over the private will such action is not irreconcilable with freedom. In reality it is only the logical application of the principles we have been seeking to elucidate. If these hold good, if the higher moral freedom is only obtainable at the cost of sacrifice, then, where that sacrifice

cannot be voluntarily obtained, the use of force becomes inevitable."

"Let me stop a moment and get my breath," I broke in. "You begin by wanting liberty ; but you recognise that all liberty must be restricted by the claims of the community. Your argument is that the State has the right to exercise force on individuals. Its object is to promote the best life, which you contend to be inseparable from the highest possible development of the individual without interference with his true freedom. But the question is, *can* people without loss of freedom be compelled by force to follow the path of virtue ?"

"Since the State," he answered, "is on our hypothesis the fuller self of the individual, it must clearly be its duty to remove hindrances which lie between the individual, in his incomplete aspect, and goodness, whether such hindrance be within him or without. Provided that this action be *negative*, solely directed, that is, to the removal of hindrances, and with the aim of giving fuller play to the action of free mind and will, it can be shown, even though it involve the use of force, to be not incompatible with freedom.

"Consider a moment :

"The Self is not a constant quantity : at a man's average level we often talk of his not doing

himself justice. Equally, when we say that he was not himself, was lacking in self-control, or in self-possession, we imply the existence of a higher self not for the moment revealed. We all, in fact, constantly fall short of our higher possibilities, and being aware that we fall short, still dimly regard them as our real potential self:—somewhat as a golf-player is wont to explain the defects of his play as a temporary relapse from an imaginary standard of excellence which he calls his form. But the Self, in its temporary obscurations, cannot be said to be free; on the contrary, we speak of its being enslaved—to drink—it may be, or passion or avarice. It can only attain to real moral freedom when it emancipates itself from such slavery and is able deliberately to follow the course which it knows to be the best. In other words, when it has rid itself of hindrances to the good life.

“This freedom, then, implies both the power of choice, and the capacity for right choice. But since human nature is weak, some external assistance is often necessary: and it was in this sense that we spoke of the negative action of the State in removing hindrances, internal as well as external. Such compulsion, if it result in the individual realising his higher and dominating his less perfect nature, will add to his essential freedom

even at the very moment of curtailing his unhampered spontaneity of action. See how you may submit to this test every law and every public act: namely, does it by its interference increase the output of free rational will? Indiscriminate outdoor relief would probably stifle the germ of independence still struggling to assert itself. On the other hand, make life in insanitary conditions legally impossible, and you will probably see an immediate result, not merely in the physique of the people, but in the growth of mind and spirit. Try to regulate the amount of alcoholic liquor we consume, our hours of sleep and work; to relieve us of our obligations towards our children, or control the disposal of our earnings, and you will, if successful, make automatic many of the actions which stand most in need of our attention. The more such actions as call for no moral effort can be rendered automatic, the better for us; and of such are our payment of taxes, our use of the post and other means of communication, our obedience to law—all these things, with many others, we perform without taking thought, as we eat and breathe and sleep. Such automatism is no infringement of our liberty, provided it is directed to actions which are actuated by no definite motive and involve no moral purpose on our part. On the contrary, it is the only means by which we can

hope to advance ; for it sets us free to turn our attention to matters which call for a right exercise of the will. But let us beware of making these latter automatic, for they should belong to the moral realm :—and this is a danger which ever overhangs the Collectivist ideal of society. It would interfere with the action of living will, and thwart rather than assist the development of true freedom.

“But this is merely by the way. I wished to illustrate the legitimate interference of the State in removing hindrances to the good life, as contrasted with instances in which such interference may overshoot its mark.”

“Then if I follow you,” I said, “you are contending that the State, when it finds itself under the necessity of applying the strait-waistcoat to any of its members, does not thereby restrict his essential freedom, seeing that it is helping the true self to emerge.”

“Quite so,” he answered, “for the individual, taken at his average level, is not fully himself : he has better moments as well as worse, and only attains his moral stature when he succeeds in permanently superseding the latter by the former ; were he ever capable of complete success, he would reach full moral freedom. But there always remains a recalcitrant element ; and it is on this,



the defective self, that his better self, represented by the State, acts, whether merely by imposing restrictions, or by actual force. But goodness is not enforceable by law; the utmost that can be done is to remove the hindrances from its path, thereby opening up new vistas for rational development, and making smooth the way to ultimate moral freedom. Regarded thus, the restrictions which hedge about the chrysalis of the limited self prove to be its sole mode of escape into the winged glories of perfect self-hood."

## CHAPTER IV

### OBLIGATION

"WELL," I said, "we have ascertained that your coveted freedom must be subjected to considerable restrictions. So far they have come chiefly from the State, representing, as you say, the fuller self of the individual. But it seems to me that others will have to be imposed from within, if you are to be logical. You admit obligations. Having once admitted them, can you stop short of their fullest possible discharge? Are you not bound, I mean, to render the State the completest service in your power? And what service can be completer than to be in its direct employ?"

"I admit," he answered, "that what we have to find is the highest possible conception of duty. The question is, does it involve the rendering of direct service to the State? or is each individual at liberty to choose the life most congenial to him? The answer is not quite so easy as it looks. The end of the State, we saw, was to promote the best

life ; and this was only compatible with the highest possible development of the individual. State action we agreed was to be judged by the degree in which it did or did not provide new opportunities for advance towards self-conscious expansion.

“Certain services the community exacts, from all alike ; others we saw to be expected, though only under the stress of a certain amount of moral suasion more or less indirect.

“In most Utopias each member of the community has his special task which is to be also a congenial one ; and it is by harmonious working of the component parts that they and the whole alike attain their development—a result only possible in society, not in isolation. Even in our work-a-day actual world, such ideal division of labour is clearly not beyond the aim of legislators. ‘The most insignificant of men,’ said Goethe, ‘may be a complete being, if he moves within the limits of his capacities and his aptitudes’ : and though the making him such lies far beyond our present educational conceptions, there is little doubt that as time goes on, it is an aim that will cease to be considered Utopian and become practical.

“To the common good each individual can contribute something peculiar to himself. A chord of

music owes its wholeness to the difference of the notes composing it. Even so the contribution made by each individual to the whole derives its value from his difference from the rest ; it is this, in fact, which constitutes his individuality. His aim should therefore be so to shape himself that he may fill some need, render some distinctive service to the community. And this will also coincide with his moral freedom, which we found to lie in being himself most completely.

“The more highly differentiated, therefore, the individuals composing a society, the more complete becomes the social bond which unites them. A man who can feel that he is rendering to the community a service at once indispensable and only to be performed by himself, will have come near to fulfilling his part in the highest attainable scheme of social harmony.

“If this line of argument holds good, the aim of the State should clearly be to secure for each individual the fullest possible opportunity for developing the particular contribution that he alone is in a position to make to the common good ; and the individual on his side should rest satisfied with nothing less than the complete differentiation on which alike depend the fullest development of his personality and the perfect harmony of the State as a whole—if we may

revert again to the image of the note and the completed chord. That, therefore, is my answer."

"I recognise," I said, "that freedom means sacrifice—sacrifice on the part of the lower self, for the promotion of the general social good. It is necessary both for self-realisation, and for the discharge of obligations to the community. Now you contend that such obligations can only be ideally performed by the rendering of some distinctive service. With whom is the determination of such service to rest? with the individual himself, or with the community? If the former, it is manifest that a door may be opened for much evasion of obvious duties on the plea that the self-selected service is paramount and all-exclusive."

"It is clear," he answered, "that the community can never be in a position to decide: the *onus probandi* must therefore rest with the individual. On his shoulders lies the burden of proof that the kind of service which he believes himself best qualified to render is one that corresponds to a real need. To require that he alone should be able to render it would be perhaps a counsel of perfection, inapplicable to the common run of humanity. But if his work is to be recognised, he must show that it is wanted—that it can be included in a general class or type of work comprehensive of his particular instance. The activities

set in motion must be shown to make for good and proved not to displace other and superior activities."

"May we go back to your own case?" I asked. "It is always easier, as well as more interesting, to take a concrete instance. Then, if I follow your argument, what you have to prove in order to clear yourself before our ethical tribunal is, that in your endeavours to enhance the value of the noble things of life, whether by your verse or otherwise, you render a greater service to the community than was possible to you while in its direct employment? There is no question of your mere right to do as you wish, for provided that you observe the law and are not a burden to the community, your bare right is clearly infeasible. But we are approaching the matter from another and a higher standpoint—from the standpoint of *noblesse oblige*. Could your action be justified here? When the alternatives are duly weighed, in which will the higher degree of usefulness be found?"

"There is evidently not much doubt in your own mind," he answered smilingly, "and yet I think I can make out a case for myself. But I am afraid you will have to allow me another rather lengthy excursus."

I nodded assent, and he continued—

“First let me state the alternatives, from my own point of view : after which I propose to enter into what may at first sight seem a digression, on the characteristics of our present stage of civilisation and its special needs.

“The alternatives then are, on the one hand, a life spent in direct service to the State—service, none the less meritorious for being subordinate and largely composed of routine : on the other, the renunciation of worldly success and ambition for a life of study and thought, in the hope of contributing to the spread of truth, communicating to a wider circle the love and consciousness of beauty—heightening, to use your own words, the sense of what is noble in life.

“Now the value of any service is conditioned by the needs of the community to which it is rendered. What I hope to show is that our community stands in urgent need of workers on the imaginative, non-material side.”

## CHAPTER V

### OUR AGE AND ITS NEEDS

"LET us try to escape from the coercive atmosphere of our surroundings and, projecting ourselves into the future, seek if we can distinguish what to a philosophic student of history may hereafter appear the distinguishing marks of our age.

"Standing in the arena, with the dust and clamour of the fray rising round us, we must almost inevitably view in a distorted perspective that which is nearest and therefore most obtrudes itself on our attention. One fact only seems to emerge with some certainty. Whichever way we look we find in progress changes more rapid and subversive than could be matched for many a long period of the world's history. They are changes mechanical, political and moral: changes in our way of life, in our ideas of government, in the very structure of our thought. Even the physical aspect of our globe is changing. Air is beginning to submit to the yoke which man has so long since



cast upon earth and fire and water ; distances dwindle, life is lengthened, each minute holds the content of five in comparison with the slower-moving centuries that are past. In every department of science new conceptions are displacing others hallowed by the recognition of ages. New forces are emerging ; even the veil that shuts us off from what we call the supernatural seems on the point of lifting, and shadows cast before by new possibilities of being stretch into our ken. It is an epoch of rapid change. A new school of scientific investigation has discovered that in the case of certain plants evolution proceeds, not continuously and evenly, but by abrupt and unaccountable starts, following on periods of marking time. It might almost seem as if such a fresh departure was even now taking place in the field of human development.

"An historian of the remote future, looking back across the slow stages of man's progress, will perhaps find a classification for human events widely differing from our own. Instead of taking for his landmarks the rise and fall of nations, the strife of dynasties, the unceasing ebb and flow of war, he may adopt a grouping in relation to which the great deeds of generals and kings and statesmen will look insignificant. His epochs may be qualified by events of a different order : Socrates giving

to the world the conception of moral freedom ; Christ proclaiming the universal brotherhood of man ; the attacks of Copernicus and Galileo on superstition ; or the invention of printing.

“But in the cataclysmic character of its effects the era of steam and electricity bids fair to erect an even loftier landmark. To these we owe the removal of boundaries, the merging of markets, the internationalisation of banking and finance ; the mechanism which brings each morning to our bedside news from the four quarters of the globe ; which puts us in instant touch with any point we desire on land—sometimes even on sea ; which collates the daily utterances of statesmen, foretells the weather, supplies our table with the produce of a dozen climes and our houses with luxuries of whose very existence our grandfathers were ignorant ; which transports us to Alaska or Peking in less time than it took them to get to Rome : these are but a few of the material advantages which the last half-century has accumulated for our convenience.

“An illustrious French thinker, following this line of thought, has gone so far as to say that mechanical invention has been the essential line of advance in man’s intelligence ; that our social life still gravitates round the fabrication and use of artificial instruments ; and that the inventions

marking the course of human progress have also decided its direction. 'L'intelligence,' he sums up, 'envisagée dans ce qui en paraît être la démarche originelle, est la faculté de fabriquer des objets artificiels, en particulier des outils à faire des outils, et d'en varier indéfiniment la fabrication.' If this be true, then no greater step forward has been taken by human intelligence in the whole history of our planet than in the last hundred years. It is of a piece with the discovery of fire, and of the use of metals. But as yet the effect would seem to have been principally on the material side. It would hardly, indeed, be paradoxical to contend that an actual moral set-back has resulted from the huge mechanical advance of the last half-century. The truth is that the world is still too much taken up with the scramble for the manna of good things which has descended upon it, to reflect upon their origin or beware lest it suffer from excessive indulgence in them. And the fate that befell the children of Israel seems like to befall us also. The feast has been too much for our brain, too much for our nervous system, above all, too much for our moral equilibrium.

"The stream which at first bore us down so pleasantly has swollen to a torrent, sweeping our boat whither it will, while we sit powerless. The mad rush hurries us along, and we must maintain

our place with the rest. There is no time to pause and take our bearings ; neither reason nor conscience can keep pace. Opportunities undreamed of, knowledge in a thousand unfamiliar forms, excitements and temptations without number, throng in upon us. We live from hand to mouth, clutching at the million pleasures and interests that we hurry past, choosing at random, rarely enjoying, hastening ever to the next, ignorant of our destination, aware only of the sense of speed, which we delude ourselves into thinking the equivalent of time well-spent. We are the slaves of circumstance rather than the masters of our fate. And in the background of the picture lurks the grimy spectre of modern Industrialism—a thing as hideous as its name. For where in the history of civilisation can we find a form of labour more enslaving than the gigantic mechanism which holds so large a proportion of the population bound to it hand and foot ? The modern trade organisation, with its cast-iron laws, and its ruthless disregard for the weakly, does but exemplify the struggle for life in its crudest, simplest form. Where is the room for humanity when the object is wealth, and the neglect of the least important detail gives advantage to a rival ? So its workers are mere units, who hand over their lives and toil in return for the bare wherewithal to

provide for material wants. If they break down, they are cast aside and their places filled from the eager crowd of the superfluous. For them life is one long unending struggle with material need ; what can they know or care for intellectual freedom, or the means to attain it ? Such pleasures as they have are like all the rest of their lives—hard and material.

“ Not long since I came across a memorable passage in a prose work of a great English poet, written some ninety years ago, which is doubly remarkable for its present bearing. ‘ The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the Empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world ; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave. To what but a cultivation of the mechanical arts in a degree disproportioned to the presence of the creative faculty, which is the basis of all knowledge, is to be attributed the abuse of all invention for abridging and combining labour, to the exasperation of the inequality of mankind ? From what other cause has it arisen that the discoveries which should have lightened, have added a weight to the curse imposed on Adam ? Poetry, and the principle of Self of which money is the visible incarnation are

the God and Mammon of the world.' These words will well bear pondering over. If they could be spoken with truth a hundred years ago—and as regards the growing inequality of mankind hardly any one will be found to disagree—what is the position now?

"Wealth has been multiplied an hundredfold. but it remains relatively, in as few or fewer hands. 'The inventions for abridging and combining labour' have indeed failed even to bring material blessings to the labourer; they have but deepened the gulf between him and his employer. And since nations and their rulers have acquiesced, it is to be presumed that the present distribution of wealth and poverty is still considered the natural and inevitable order of things. To such as may be in doubt, Shelley's words may perhaps suggest an explanation, and a remedy. So long as it lasts, we can hardly lay claim to a moral advance corresponding to the enlargement of man's empire over the external world. The ennobling of the race, which has been the vision of so many poets and thinkers, remains but a vision. Nietzsche's intellectual aristocracy, Wells' Samurai are as far from realisation as the intellectual republics dreamed of by Wordsworth and Coleridge.

"Self-indulgence and luxury rather than enlight-

enment have followed in the train of wealth. We can neither claim to show a spread of the civic spirit, a new step forward in art or literature, greater honesty in politics or higher ideals either in public or private life. The pursuit and worship of wealth is the mainspring of our actions ; pleasure is our highest good. When Lord Beaconsfield said of us ' We mistake comfort for civilisation ' he laid his finger, with its unerring certainty of touch, upon the root-evil. Yet even he could hardly have foreseen how quickly the canker would spread."

"It is a material age, certainly," I rejoined. "I suppose that few who observe from a detached standpoint would question the accuracy of your survey in its general lines. But you will admit also that the defects of our civilisation are set off by its qualities. There is no lack of energy or motive power. Every man is expected to be doing something and is looked down on if he is not."

"I grant," he answered, "that few people, whatever their practice, would dare nowadays openly to avow Epicurean principles ; and even if it is pleasure that we pursue, it is action that we agree to honour. Yes, there is certainly no lack of energy. The ideal of the strenuous life is kept always before our eyes. It is preached from pulpits and thrones, dinned into us from the

columns of the daily press, thrust at us from between the covers of our favourite fiction ; it is the only road to public estimation ; it wins the highest prizes even from fashionable society.

“ In all but a very small section even of the so-called ‘leisured’ class, some definite occupation is the condition of a man’s enjoying his neighbour’s esteem. And that public opinion should have got so far is certainly one of the signs of health in a luxurious and self-indulgent age. At a later stage it will perhaps begin to scrutinise the nature of the occupation more critically than at present, and use its powers of reflection upon the building up of general principles for individual guidance. At present its theories of conduct—if they amount to theories—are of the rough and ready order. Indeed for the average man they are hardly, as yet, articulate. If he reaches the conception that each individual is born with a certain measure of energy, for which he should endeavour to find an outlet, he does not concern himself with the direction of the channel into which that energy is diverted. Whether it be for public or private ends is a matter upon which he does not enter. And as the primitive impulse of man is towards acquisition and self-advancement, the rough and ready result is that in spite of our vaunted progress a large proportion of human



effort is still expended avowedly with these objects. Even our qualities, therefore, seem to me to savour somewhat unduly of the material.

“Now civilisation is an artificial process, the essence of which lies in the control acquired by man’s higher powers over his lower instincts by the means of education. His gradual rise from the animal state to that of reason and responsibility has been accomplished by dint of an unending struggle between the two sides of his nature, in which the ideal side has made slow but steady advances over the original, primitive, animal side. By the process of education he has risen from a sensuous life, governed by instinct, to a moral life, governed by reason.

“But the moral life of reason, which is what distinguishes civilised man from the savage and the animal who can be trained by custom and fear to habits of obedience and order, is consciously conducted: whereas the activity of the average man, even when it conduces to social well-being, is often largely automatic. To live in accordance with the conditions of rational life, he must understand those conditions; and to understand them his powers of reflection must have been submitted to a high degree of training. But it is just there that our scheme of education falls short. It fails to develop intellectual reflection and will from the

earliest possible moment in life ; it fails to inculcate the conscious aim of dominating the lower impulses by the higher—the original nature by the ideal.

“Where the reflective powers are deficient, existence is perforce directed more or less haphazard, guided, as circumstances chance, now by the impulses of the lower, now of the higher nature. Consequently the average man, with all his laudable demand for activity, is commonly satisfied provided that acquisition—getting—in one form or another is achieved. In other words, whereas in the ideal state all activity would be directed to the general social well-being, in the actual state it is sufficient that it be directed to private and individual aims. While, then, we demand strenuousness, we are not over-critical as to the form it shall take : in fact it suffices that the employment can be classified—politics, army or navy, church or bar, banking, business, farming—it matters little, so long as a definite label can be attached. A man may be enriching himself by the sale of adulterated foods or poisonous spirits, by issuing to the public shares of shaky companies, by speculating with his client’s money ; the label, successful business man, will procure him general consideration and qualify him for inclusion among the strenuous. Still less, if he be merely spending a large fortune honestly come by, will he be required

to render any account of his stewardship. Has he not a right to do as he will with his own? The fact that he may be squandering the equivalent of the revenues of a State on his own pleasures or caprices, while disclaiming all responsibility for the public weal or woe, does not even give rise to comment."

"Are you not a little too exacting in your requirements?" I asked. "That we expect some work from every one is surely a long step in the right direction. We must necessarily, to begin with, use rather rough and ready standards for measuring success—though as a matter of fact public opinion does direct a pretty close scrutiny nowadays into the careers of the successful."

"What I am contending," he answered, "is that there is still much room for development among the successful—and the well-to-do generally—of the sense of public responsibility. The want of it I believe to be largely due to the fact that the training of the reflective powers is neglected, and neglected because we live in an age which puts its highest values on material things.

"Witness the tribute paid to the magnates of industry in America—the country where the type can be found freest from the alloys which in Europe sometimes obscure it—a taste for art, or sport, literary or philanthropic leanings. Studied

in its simplest form, as it may be in a hundred cities in the west, it contains much food for reflection.

"The type has fine qualities—intelligence specialised to an extreme point, boundless energy, will, and power of concentration, unwearied appetite for work, combined with the capacity for self-sacrifice,—such qualities as, united in a single individual and focussed upon a special task, cannot fail to carry all before them. These are men of the pioneering type, charged with the practical problems of a country growing beyond its strength; accustomed to think in square leagues and millions; mapping out continents into townships and railway systems as a child plays with its toy blocks. Many such an one can point to a network of industry encircling the globe, of which the germ sprang from his own brain. It is, I repeat, a vigorous, nay a splendid type, performing a necessary work; but it is a work that calls for the sacrifice of every other interest. The successful conduct of an organisation more complex than the government of a small State, with competition of rival States to be met and worsted, taxes a man's whole powers to the limit of endurance—often, indeed, beyond it. Every ounce of intelligence, every unit of energy, every moment of time, must be brought to bear, and the work cannot but

constitute and bound his universe, as effectually as does the ant-hill that of the ant.

“Art and literature and music, the wonders of science, the lessons of history, the lives of great men, remain a closed book for him, shut out by the practical unending round which closes in his vision on every side. Attempt to talk to him of such matters, and he will hardly be able to conceal the slight gesture of contempt which betrays his superiority to them. Nothing that cannot be expressed in terms of his all-engrossing subject, can truthfully be said to have value for him, or even a place in his universe. Often neither the politics of his own nor of any other country gain admittance there. He is isolated on all sides—a machine, endowed with intelligence for the successful fabrication of great enterprises, and calculated to work on at top speed until the main-shaft breaks or the driving power gives out.

“Money, as a means of procuring enjoyment, has oftener than not no value for him; it is merely a device for registering the position he occupies relatively to his rivals—one of the tests by which success or failure in the world may be computed. But his personal expenses are few and the simplicity of his household more akin to that of the Pilgrim Fathers than of a prince of industry.

"Such men doubtless find many a short-cut for the onrush of material development at the heels of which intellectual advance is to follow : and their very lack of wider interests only sets free the more energy for concentration upon the solution of pressing practical problems ; but the type is limited enough, with no eyes for any but one narrow aspect of the multifarious universe spread out on every side of it. Splendid indeed they are, these leaders of industry, and indispensable ; yet a wider outlook, even if it should restrict their output, would certainly add to their civic efficiency and invest their achievement with a more comprehensive quality. They are as yet incomplete human beings, developed only on one side."

"In England, surely," I interposed, "the interest taken in public affairs is greater, nor is the absence of general cultivation so complete as in the case you have just been describing ?"

"You may be right," he answered. "It seems to me that we are just as far away from the essentials of a comprehensive and enlightened education. We, too, worship the successful, and our standards, as might be expected from a race which has so widely overstepped its own borders and impressed its rule on so large a portion of the globe, are of the rigidly practical order. Our strength lying in administration, we set little store

by theory and book-learning, but attach ourselves closely to the concrete. Hence,—I speak of the average men whose views go to shape public opinion—as physical power is our test of national, so is wealth of private importance. To say that our reverence for it amounts to worship is a truism: we admit that it is deplorable but consider it inevitable. The ideal frankly aimed at and tacitly encouraged in many of the public schools is to have a good time—the pursuit of pleasure; and in this they have the sanction of many English and French thinkers of the last two centuries. With these hedonists, luckily a small minority, though it is to be found in every class, the idea of public service is an anachronism.

“Subject to these qualifications—in such strange incongruity with the ideals of the creed we officially profess—we in England accept the strenuous ideal of life, not scrutinising too closely its form, provided that success results. But though generous in what we admit to the category of the strenuous we are severe enough in what we exclude.

“The body of middle-class opinion, unyielding even when it is least articulate, demands indeed that a man should do something, but looks askance on such callings as belong to that side of life roughly to be assigned to the heading of imagination; everything of which the effect cannot at

once be measured, weighed, or expressed in terms of pounds, shillings and pence. Its touchstone is a utilitarian one. It would rather have its sons bankers than poets or painters, rather they brewed beer than that they wrote novels. Its reading is the newspaper and the political pamphlet and not literature. It seeks its statecraft rather in the study of current events than in the lessons of the past ; setting indeed small store by aught that the dust of buried ages covers. Scientific research it tolerates, provided that some practical application be in view ; but the epithet scientific, applied personally, is not without a slighting connotation. See how few of the upper and middle class destine their sons for any scientific calling."

"It respects journalism," I interrupted.

"Of course," he replied, "for the journalist wields power: but pure literature it classes with the drama and all non-religious art, as belonging to the category of the amusements rather than the business of life. Like Plato, it would banish all but devotional poetry from its Republic. There are, of course, certain well-defined exceptions to be made. It respects Academicians and pays its annual *visite de cérémonie* to their works. Among poets it honours the laureate, whose name is to be found among the Court officials and who probably has the right to wear uniform. Even certain



novelists it esteems, especially if their works are reported to have a moral purpose, or if they have been distinguished by the public approbation of an Archbishop or an orthodox statesman ; but towards the painter, the poet, and the imaginative writer as a class its attitude is not uncoloured by a *nuance* of contempt. As for the smaller fry belonging to these callings, it frankly looks down on them and is at no pains to conceal the fact."

"I rather doubt this," I said. "I should have thought that the writer of books was regarded with a certain respect verging on admiration—based, if you like, upon a want of understanding, and consequently generally misplaced—but still respect rather than contempt."

"It may be so," he replied. "Nevertheless I am convinced you would find a very common feeling of impatience that men who might be making money or earning official distinction should waste their time in such frivolous pursuits. The fact is that the middle class has neither sympathy nor understanding with artistic aspirations of any kind ; and lacking the imagination to comprehend, it condemns wholesale what falls short of its utilitarian standard. Thus a certain social disqualification clings to most followers of imaginative pursuits—always, of course, excepting those to whom noteworthy success has fallen. What pro-

portion of their output, for instance, do the public schools send forth to be artists, musicians, or actors? From the choice of these professions for their lifework the strenuous would fain preserve their sons.

“We still apparently retain something of the distrust of the written language that we find among men living in close touch with nature, and guided in their actions by a traditional knowledge, profounder perhaps than books can give, but empirical rather than scientific. Our training in many practical walks of life is mostly oral: a beginner must pick up the rudiments of his profession as best he may; there will be no treatise to instruct him, and often enough none of his actual instructors capable of giving him a reasoned and comprehensive theory of his duties. The result is patent enough; it is revealed in every branch of our national activity, from statecraft to farming; in our slowness to adopt the fresh discoveries of science, or to apply them in our commerce; in our distrust of new mechanical inventions long after they have been installed by all our neighbours; in our proverbial ‘muddling through’; in our weights and measures; even in our much-belauded Constitution.

“Those who distrust books, even as a guide in practice, are not likely to go into them for recrea-

tion—to books, that is, worthy of the name. Art plays as small, or even a smaller part. Whether its present inferiority is due to public neglect or the neglect due to the inferiority is a moot point. Certain it is that at few periods in modern times has so little encouragement, public or private, been given either to art or literature, as with us at the present day. Equally certain is it that the heyday of both coincided with a period of eager rivalry of rich patrons and States during the Renaissance to secure the services of eminent artists and scholars, and to vie with each other in rewarding them. The probability is that so long as potential owners of beautiful things are content, in the details of their houses and surroundings, with ugly or ill-executed work, the level of artistic handicraft will remain low; just as literary standards remain slipshod and unscholarly so long as there is a public of readers which asks for nothing better.”

“We have heard all this very often before,” I said. “Much of it is doubtless true—though I confess to a dislike of sweeping generalisation. Well, admitting that it is true, let us see what results we have reached. Art, you contend—imaginative art in every form—is not a part of our national life, but stands outside it: pure literature to the average plain man is non-existent; philosophy, of course, you would include in the same

category as incomprehensible to him and a waste of time, if not actually pernicious."

"We certainly dwell chiefly in the realm of the concrete," he rejoined. "The most enthusiastic admirer of our age would not deny it—indeed it would probably be one of the principal grounds of his admiration. Yet he would admit that our nature has a spiritual side which requires nourishment. And he could hardly still argue that that nourishment is supplied by religion; for where its authority has not been altogether relaxed, it has commonly become a perfunctory performance of external observances carrying with them little reality.

"It is soul, in short, that is being starved. 'What is suitable to the soul?' was the question which Diotima asked Socrates: and she proceeded to answer it. 'Intelligence and every other power and excellence of the mind: of which all poets and all other artists who are creative and inventive are the authors.' Plato thus puts poetry and the creative arts first. Poetry, art, philosophy and religion; these, with the wide range of minor interests which they cover, constitute the imaginative side of life—that side in which the Greeks so far excelled all other peoples before or since; and in which we, with all our material and moral superiority, lag so far behind them."

"Yes," I mused, "the Greeks alone could confer immortality. All that they touched—poetry, philosophy, politics, religion, science, language,—became transfused with life—a life that becomes more vivid as the centuries pass."

"I have just been reading," he went on, "an author who seems to me to lay his finger on the cause (it is H. S. Chamberlain, in his memorable survey of the *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*). Here is the passage; 'compared with all other phenomena of history Greece displays an overwhelmingly rich flowering of the human mind, and the cause is that her whole culture rests upon an artistic basis.' The word he uses is *kuenstlerisch*, which of course is much more than the equivalent of our 'artistic.' With us it is a word whose associations rob it of the full sense it should have here: it fails to connote that very creative quality which was the secret of all Greek activity. In the context to the passage I quoted before Shelley lays his finger unerringly upon our lack of it. 'We want the creative faculty,' he says, 'to imagine that which we know: we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life: our calculations have outrun conception: we have eaten more than we can digest.'

"Without cultivation, civilisation may indeed

advance, but it becomes, to borrow again from Chamberlain, 'an ant community, raised to the highest power, increasingly busier, more comfortable, and less free, but based on changing facts, and therefore relative.'"

"Then you consider," I asked, "that we too are in danger of becoming such a community?"

"That we are material, pleasure-loving, utilitarian and lacking in artistic insight and understanding is, at least, the charge brought against us; and not only by our enemies, but by many critics dwelling among ourselves. It would certainly have been endorsed by all poets of the first rank in the century which is past, by the professed philosophers, and also by many of the unofficial counsellors of humanity. Among them I might call to witness Ruskin, Carlyle, Emerson, Tolstoi, Renan, Meredith, Matthew Arnold, and many a lesser name. It is a formidable indictment; but who will venture, in the face of such an array of evidence, to assert that it is devoid of truth?"

"Do you think it remediable?" I asked.

"I am only indirectly concerned with the cause or the remedy," he answered. "If we seek the former we shall probably find that in each case the evil can be traced either to ignorance or lack of imagination. To either one or the other we may,

I think, ascribe the paralysing strife of nations, their greed of territory, the mad race for wealth, and the co-existence of abject poverty with reckless luxury."

"If it is so, I fear the second ill is incurable," I said. "But the statement seems to me to require support."

"Ignorance at least you would admit," he answered. "A little more imagination would make it difficult for us to shut our eyes so complacently: we are quick enough to remedy the evils that are forced upon our notice. Would the spectacle of life in conditions of tragic squalor and degradation continue if the well-to-do were compelled to watch from their windows its daily unfolding? Would war be so frequent if every statesman had been through the horrors of a campaign? Would our recreations be as unintelligent if our education had made us conversant with higher pleasures? Our minds are stagnant for want of knowledge, our imagination atrophied for lack of proper stimuli. I still adhere to my statement:—Ignorance and want of imagination—these are the begetters of most of the grosser evils of our age.

"Ignorance can be cured by education," he continued after a pause. "But imagination? If it can be developed at all it is only by the help of

Art, coupled with the spread of Philosophy to show things in their right perspective. It is here that we are furthest of all from the Greeks!

“Be this as it may, it becomes at least patent that we can ill spare any counteracting influence. Where the scales are so unevenly balanced, every ounce of weight gains additional value. We can dispense with no worker in imaginative fields, however humble; for provided he be in earnest and prepared to exert himself to the full of his capacities, he may contribute, if it be but by the forming of a nucleus for the distribution of energy.”



## CHAPTER VI

### THE ARTISTIC TEMPERAMENT

"I BEGIN to see daylight," I said—"I mean the bearing of all this on your own case—Your argument is that our age is preeminently material and utilitarian : that its chief need is consequently on the imaginative side. Now it is in that field, I suppose, that your own inclinations and aptitudes lie ? And I suppose you will therefore contend that in developing them you will have satisfied both the conditions the necessity of which we postulated ? You will claim, I mean, to have realised your ideal liberty, if that is 'being yourself most completely' : and at the same time to have performed some service which only you could render, and which yet was indispensable to the public weal ? In short, you will be among those few and happy mortals whose duty and inclination coincide ! But don't forget another point you established—that the burden of proof lies upon the individual. You have got to show that the

work you have chosen is of direct service to the community, and fills a distinctive want. And I am not sure that I am clear in what exactly it consists ? ”

“At any rate,” he retorted, “the work I am laying down did not fulfil what seems to me the most essential of all conditions, namely, that a man’s life-work should be what really interests him. I cannot claim that a larger proportion of it was of the nature of routine and drudgery than in most other professions. Nor would the fact that I was often the instrument in carrying out a policy with which I personally disagreed alone justify me in the course I took : that is part and parcel of normal official life. But my real interests lie elsewhere. It is a fine thing to work, if only as a stoker, in the power-house which transmits its current in so wide a circuit round the globe ; yet there are natures which its atmosphere stifles, and its ceaseless din and movement merely deafen, bewilder, and stupefy. The unit loses the power of detached and tranquil thought, his personality merges in that of the machine, so that he is swept along into the acceptance of aims and ambitions which his innermost reason whispers him to reject. All the while I was really out of harmony, not so much with the mechanism of Government itself, as with the atmosphere which surrounds it, and the

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scale of values which it imposes. With a fine ideal of work and self-effacement it combines a point of view that is worldly and material. Its whole perspective is remote from mine. I want to be able to shake myself free of preconceptions, and quit an atmosphere which cannot but insensibly colour every outlook, for one where, standing aloof, I can confront the problem squarely and without bias. I grudge the expenditure of precious life on work that at the best can be only half congenial to me ; life so quickly over, so rich in possibilities ; work that runs upon a groove, between banks that for ever exclude the greater part of the fair surrounding prospect. Do I expect to do good, you ask ? I hardly know. Right gladly would I give pleasure—perhaps comfort and help : but even stronger, I suspect, is the desire to realise myself—to find some expression for the innermost being so restlessly craving for an issue. I feel at moments as if something within me were in touch with an imperishable fount of beauty, welling up from a hidden source ; and as if, with greater leisure and freedom from preoccupation, the slender trickle which finds in me its outlet, might grow into a brook at which a few parched lips could quench their thirst. But this is doubtless illusion : and I would gladly forswear attempting the rôle of creator if I could help in any way to

spread the appreciation of the great creations of others.

"Beauty is all about us ; but it has needed the insight of the great creative artists to reveal it to mankind in the ever-changing aspect of its myriad forms. Poets, painters, seers, prophets, lawgivers ; it is to them that vision has been vouchsafed, to their effort that every fresh advance made by humanity has been due. These are the discoverers : others coming behind have but levelled and tilled.

"All the great steps forward are traceable to ideas—ideas originating often in the stillness of the hills, or the teeming solitude of a library. How often does history show that so-called stubborn facts are but the material in which ideas have chosen to body themselves forth. A little thought, conceived in the silence of a fertile brain, has set the wheels of greater events in motion than a hundred wars. If I cannot hope to originate, I may at least seek to propagate. It is given to all to be able to search out and compare the ideas of others and help to spread them in wider fields. My rôle might lie there—to point the way towards the temple-gates behind which the sacred mysteries of life are being unveiled."

His face, as he spoke, was turned towards the distant down-land, cutting the sky with its firm and sweeping outlines, yet melting into the plain

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in an indescribable softness of blue haze. His eyes were lit with the fire of conviction : and in his voice, too, the note of enthusiasm vibrated unmistakably. I was loth to suggest dissent or disparagement ; but I was still in doubt. I wished, too, to remind him that the jury to be convinced was composed of successful men of the world : so I hardened my heart and returned to the charge.

“ Most poets and artists would doubtless agree with you, my dear friend : but I am afraid it will take more to convince the plain man that you are right. He holds certain deeply-rooted prepossessions which you have to overcome ; and prominent among them is a distrust of the artistic temperament, of the contemplative ideal of life, of ‘ quietism ’ and Dilettantism generally : all of which defects he will impute to you.

“ He is not to be driven from his stubbornly-held position. ‘ Let a man do the work that lies to hand, and be thankful that he has it to do. He will find occupation enough without bothering his head about the improvement of humanity, the progress of civilisation, the spread of ideas. What we want is efficient citizens.’ ”

“ Well, I take up your challenge,” he answered. “ Let us see how far this attitude is justified in the present case. Does the ‘ Artistic Temperament ’

—admitting for the sake of argument that the term holds good here—merit the opprobrium so universally heaped upon it? ‘That excuse for impotent idleness and selfishness,’ it is called by an eminent critic in a recent book,—and undoubtedly it has often served to give a romantic colouring to the evasion of plain duties. But because the name has been usurped and misapplied need it necessarily become a term of disparagement? Why should it so commonly be used to imply rather the connotations of an artist’s nature—the unpractical, dreamy, indolent, self-indulgent side—than the creative gifts which are its true content?”

“The reason is not far to seek,” I replied. “The average citizen derives less pleasure from the qualities than inconvenience from the defects which so frequently accompany them. And the proportion is ill-preserved. A half-pennyworth of the former is apt to suffice for an intolerable deal of the latter.”

“I am none the less fervently convinced,” he rejoined, “that the Artistic Temperament is the soul out of which all poetry and music, all the plastic arts, all man’s imaginative creativeness have emerged. It has as the basis of its composition a love of beauty—and this, in proportion to its strength, is perpetually seeking outlet in expression. When it finds such outlet, works of art result

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whose value brings even the average citizen to a grumbling acquiescence in their creator's lack of stable, work-a-day qualities. But in proportion as production dwindles, so does the average citizen's impatience increase; and when it becomes non-existent, or of a quality which his faculties are untrained to appreciate, this impatience finds vent in vigorous language. Yet there beneath the surface, all the while, the sense of beauty, interacting with other minds in unseen but restless ferment, may be ripening towards fresh growth. Passive though the function of such minds may seem—mere conductors for the flashing current—let us not forget that without conductors the current will bury itself uselessly in the soil. Should we not rather, then, welcome the artistic temperament as among the greatest of all gifts? and when it is unaccompanied with the gift of expression, should we not pity rather than blame? Instead of making it a reproach, should we not bestir ourselves to see that it be so tended and disciplined as to come to fruition? Forget not that a few scattered grains of gold repay the crushing and sifting of many tons of rock."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE STRENUOUS LIFE

"THEY will call you 'quietest' too," I suggested.

"'Quietist,' I suppose, is a term intended to convey disparagement," he said. "I do not know if I understand its exact significance; but I take it to imply one whose love of ease and peace leads him to shun the world and its strife, and seek out byways where he may ramble undisturbed? I picture one who would rather dream than fight, and shrinks from life's responsibilities and ambitions, from duties as well as rewards, to lead a life of self-indulgent ease.

"The quietist himself, if I may speak for him, would doubtless give a very different account of his position. He would urge both the need and the right for study and thought, and defend himself warmly from the charge of self-indulgence."

"The whole matter, in fact," I said, "resolves itself into a renewal of the time-honoured controversy between the advocates of the active and the



contemplative life ; and that is a controversy which has ebbed and flowed all down the tide of history from Greek times to our own."

"Yet I have never been able to see where the real bone of contention lies," he answered. "The contemplative man, if he works his brain, can claim for his efforts the name of action just as fairly as the active. But the latter wants to see tangible and immediate results, and therefore will not allow it.

"Because we contemplative people are content to renounce the prizes, and think that other things matter more than achievement, they put us down as useless dreamers. 'Come forth into the arena,' they cry, 'strive and rejoice in the combat, give blow for blow, carve your way to fortune, expend yourself, above all be successful, and do not count the cost.'

"But we, who are quite as ready to strive, though by other methods, must perforce decline the challenge. We cling as closely to our aims ; that they are vital to progress is an article of our faith : but we must work for them in our own way. We only ask for the same tolerance as we concede."

"And there, I think, you expect too much," I answered. "It isn't human nature for the man who comes 'dry with rage and extreme toil' when

the fight is done, to look otherwise than impatiently on the man who has sat gazing at it through his glasses, even though he may have given useful information to the generals. But I admit that these active people are often in so great a hurry to get things done that they plunge into the fray without pausing to examine either the cause at issue or the tactics to pursue : just as your friends are so nice about the preliminaries that ere their armour is girt on the tide of battle often enough has drifted past them."

"To make a perfect whole each must borrow of the other," he said. "But while *we* recognise the necessity for different methods *they* see only one, and would compel the whole world to follow it. That, I think, is how the difficulty arises. Look at the creed which Mr. Roosevelt, that chief apostle of the strenuous, has recently been expounding to so many European audiences. A healthful, vigorous, inspiring creed indeed it is. Rightly he extols 'the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming.' Rightly he pours contempt on the 'distant intellectualism which cannot accept contact with the realities of life,' or 'those timid and cold beings who know neither victory nor defeat' : on

‘people of cloistered life, to whom the contact with other men is distasteful.’ He has no mercy for the critic who stands aloof and sneers at the shortcomings of the doer of deeds instead of descending to bear his own part in the *mêlée*. He would have us all fighters, in fact ; and for the majority of mankind it is certain that this ideal, in its straightforward simplicity, is at once the most inspiring and the most intelligible. Effort, indefatigable and unremitting, is the sole condition of progress. Its relaxation means instant stagnation. We see it in every field of life ; from the crustaceans, which at an early stage of evolution developed an armour that made them invulnerable to their enemies, and have evolved no further ; to individuals and even nations. So soon as effort dwindles, mollusc, or man, or nation cease to develop and remain stationary amid universal progress. And since comfort attained almost invariably results in diminution of effort, its spread may well give practical thinkers cause for alarm. Mr. Roosevelt, then, is right ; effort must at all cost be maintained. But is it of one kind only ? It is here that we join issue—Is it always to be judged by results—to be measured, weighed and valued, in terms of the practical and visible ? Here, surely, the strenuous overshoot the mark ? for while their standard holds good for the majority,

its application can not be universal. There are certain activities which it fails to register, and which call for finer balances. So large a share of man's energies must needs be absorbed by the hand-to-hand struggle with matter that the demands of spirit are apt to be pushed aside and overlooked. And so it happens that a silent army, whose worth can hardly be measured by results, since their success is but a hair's-breadth removed from failure, must almost inevitably fall short if judged by the utilitarian standard. Of such would be many less prominent workers in imaginative fields—artists, writers, and thinkers, insufficiently equipped, perhaps, to attract notice, yet inspired with definite aims, and expending each his due proportion of effort, on objects commonly little esteemed. What is ambition to such an one? Not, at least, the wish ‘de devenir fort, d’être un grand homme, un homme connu dans un arrondissement, dans un Département—dans trois Provinces—comme les décrotteurs qui aspirent à être bottiers, les cochers à devenir palefreniers, les valets à faire les maîtres, l’ambitieux d’être député ou ministre, décoré et conseiller municipal.’

“Such prizes are as meaningless to him as are his own to the plain man—the two speak a different language, have different aims, and must be differently judged.”

"But since there is work to be done, these are surely the right ideals for the majority?" I asked.

"I do not dispute it," he replied, "all can work, and must be led to, either by reward or force, as fits the case. But there are sensitives whom rough contact with the world warps; there are weaklings, the halt and maimed in life, unfitted for the ruder struggle. Are they, too, to be driven into the fray?"

"There are natures capable it may be of good work, whom the stern discipline of the ranks shrivels and contracts; who push out their slender flowers only in sheltered hedgerows and not in the wind-swept plain. But they would fare hardly under Mr. Roosevelt's code. We can imagine the scorn with which he would have scourged Rousseau! how he would have driven Thoreau back from his meditations in the woods into the haunts of men; how short a shrift he would have allowed to Francis Thompson or Verlaine. He would have kept Keats to his pestle and mortar and Flaubert to his law!"

"But rulers must legislate for the mass," I objected. "And it is to the mass that Mr. Roosevelt is speaking. Preach to them a manly ideal and they will understand it: the exceptions will manage to escape through the meshes of the net."

"It does not fall to the lot of all to bear the burden of government," he continued, pursuing the train of his thought. "There are those fitted neither by opportunity nor temperament for the rough and tumble of the world's practical work. Yet do they necessarily cut a sordid figure in the pages of history because it is not given them to share 'the high pride, the stern belief, the lofty enthusiasm of the men who quell the storm and ride the thunder.' They too may be active, though in a humbler field. Contrast with this ideal of strenuous bustle and endeavour another view of life, that of the Greeks. I will read you a passage from Professor Butcher :

" 'The history of the word σχολή in its transition from "leisure" to "school," through the intermediate stage of "philosophical discussion," is the unconscious testimony of the Greek genius to the pure and disinterested love of learning. Greek "leisure" is sometimes spoken of slightly as if it were the luxury of the rich or the dilettanti, an easy sauntering through life and avoidance of painful effort. But in truth it is not the opposite of activity, but a special form of activity, the strenuous exercise of the intellectual or artistic faculties. It is no state of blissful indolence, which is the ideal of some Orientals ; no life of feasting, which is the ideal of the savage : no

round of trivial amusement, which is the ideal of the man of fashion : it is work, genuine work ; not, however, to satisfy bodily wants and the needs of animal existence, but to appease a pressing mental appetite—the desire for knowledge or the desire for beauty.

“ ‘Leisure and Work,—the two ideas are to some minds inconsistent, but here is their point of meeting. “To do their duty is their only holiday,” is a description we read of Athenian characters in Thucydides. *To work their minds*, that too is their holiday, their true *σχολή*, the leisure that is worthy of one who is at heart more than a mere mechanic, whose energies are not all spent upon task-work done to order, with quick returns of profit as his reward, but who has free activities of mind which claim scope and play, energies which are voluntary, self-imposed, delightful ; which result in the discipline, the quickening of every human faculty : useless, it may be, in the estimation of those who believe only in machinery, but for all who would not sacrifice the ends of life to the means, to be counted among the first conditions of existence.’

“This is the other side of the picture. It represents an ideal infinitely alluring to many a contemplative spirit whose joy in the things of mind in no way deadens their sense of the

responsibilities of life. But could it hope to pass muster with the strenuous?

"There are many who could say with Flaubert 'les plus grands événements de ma vie ont été quelques pensées, des lectures, certains couchers de soleil au bord de la mer, et des causeries de cinq ou six heures consécutives avec un ami.'

"To such the practical details of government, the conflict of parties and of personalities, the common aims and ambitions of man, seem as fleeting as the passage of the clouds across the face of the firmament. To these the realisation for themselves of truth and beauty is the paramount aim, and in their apprehension and love alone can true life be lived. Those born with the yearning for enquiry, or for artistic creation, must be true to their nature or fall short morally."

"Mr. Roosevelt would probably agree with you," I admitted, "as regards those thinkers and artists who can be shown to confer a direct social benefit on their fellows: but what of the mediocrities, the failures, the weakly aspirants whose contribution is confined to unproductive sentiment and talk, to misdirected and unstable enthusiasms? In other walks the mediocrities can generally earn a living: here they so often starve. What need has the community for this army of camp-followers whose vaguely generous aims may be merely a



cloak for self-indulgence, whose very want of recognition is a proof of their superfluity? Let them take their place in the ranks with the rest, drill and fight, fulfil their appointed tasks and justify their existence.

"This once more, as you see, brings us finally face to face with the problem: Are the unsuccessful, non-productive, artist and thinker wanted? Is there any place for the contemplative ideal in a modern democracy?"

"There is an answer," he said, "which I came across recently in the pages of a modern critic,—also, alas! artist and poet, and as such perhaps suspect in this connection:

"'The crowd of unproductive failures fans and disperses enthusiasm; and, as a mirror in a school-boy's hand flashes its round of light into the dingiest corners of the class-room,—nay, suddenly by inadvertence well-nigh blinds his master,—so prodigal sons have danced the glory of genius through conventionality's gloomiest retreats, and dazzled eyes that cared not a whit whether or no its sun were risen.

"'Untaxed centres of light and heaven might do much to mellow the strenuousness of a world at last aware of its more obvious duties and willing to grapple with them.'

"This is, at least, one answer. For Art to

thrive there must exist a sympathetic atmosphere, furnished by those who both know the difficulties surmounted and can make good, because they understand, the shortcomings. The very failure to achieve brings them knowledge, and knowledge quickly breeds enthusiasm for what is good, and keeps alive many a flickering lamp. Taste and judgment spring from the clash of many minds sharing a common interest; the love of Art is multiplied and stored, as plants accumulate chlorophyll, for future use. So, often, in obscure corners, a ferment is set up whence in the end the whole mass becomes leavened."

"I doubt if our plain man would find that very convincing," I said. "He wants results—something that he can point to as the direct consequence of action."

"Action again!" he exclaimed. "It amounts to a superstition! but I can quote Emerson against him. 'Why should we be cowed by the name of Action? 'Tis but a trick of the senses, no more. We know that the ancestor of every action is a thought.' And again, elsewhere: 'Nature will not have us fret and fume—She does not like our benevolence or our learning much better than she likes our frauds and wars. When we come out of the caucus, or the bank, or the abolition-convention or the temperance-meeting of

the Transcendental Club into the fields and woods, she says to us, 'So hot? my little sir.'

"Does not our fussy and officious activity indeed at times come perilously near the ridiculous? By its side there is a dignity about Oriental philosophy with its stately inertia, which almost tempts us to seek with it a standpoint outside the welter of changing facts! Any philosophy, at least, owes to its detachment this advantage, that it never mistakes the means for the end; that it views life in a wide perspective, nor lets the proximate obscure its field of vision. Those whose hearing is deadened by the din of conflict judge of things only by their bearing on the issue of the fight; but he who stands a little apart may mark the arrival of new forces in the field, and enable his commanders to anticipate and outflank a threatened attack. He may even, lifting his eyes to the hills, get visions of a serener state where incessant strife is not the sole condition of progress, where ideas count for more than acquisition."

"Beware," I said, "if you wish to be listened to, of appearing to decry the strenuous ideal!"

"I merely question its universal applicability," he answered. "For workers in practical fields it is a sane and healthy and inspiring creed; but those whose sphere is the realm of imagination

must needs be governed by other aims. And we may be well content that so it is : for surely there is room for workers of every sort and condition. Every personality, every taste, may be brought to fruition, so they be honestly developed. In the great economy of nature we may surmise the existence of purpose, even when our eyes fail to discover, or our imagination to depict it. So we may gladly see the prizes awarded to the successful man of action ; but let us not be so altogether certain that unsuccessful aspirants in the field of Art or speculation, humble seekers after truth, or those to whom knowledge and cultivation are in themselves a paramount aim, count for nothing in the scheme of things."

## CHAPTER VIII

### GREECE

"FROM the passage you read me just now," I mused, "it is evident that the Greeks had the same problem."

"'Except the blind forces of nature nothing moves in the world which is not Greek in its origin,'" he quoted. "What is more, they solved it. At least, if they had any non-productive artists or thinkers, they did not need to apologise for them, seeing that from the time of the Persian wars the contemplative ideal had, as you know, been dear to them."

"I know nothing," I said, "or very little. Tell me."

"It would mean another dissertation," he rejoined, "and take much too long; besides, it will not help us much."

"Never mind," I said, "I will smoke my pipe and enjoy the view, and you shall display your superior knowledge. It will be a very proper

division of labour : and you may say what you like, for I can't trip you up."

"Well," he replied, "you know at least that when the small Greek States first came into being, their very existence depended upon their being in a condition of alert and fully-armed defence. To this end all their energies were directed, and the services of every able-bodied citizen were compulsorily enlisted ; self-preservation dictated no less. The whole machinery of State was contrived for the turning out of efficient soldiers and citizens : the claims of the individual as man were ignored. Education was a matter of training and habit, not of reason. Till well past middle age civic and military duties occupied the whole of life. It was only after fifty that a man acquired the right to a certain amount of leisure to apply to his own ends. In Sparta, as later on in Republican Rome, the study of Science, Art and Philosophy were prohibited. But in Athens, once the Persian danger was removed, and the citizen's duties so far relaxed as to allow him breathing space, they came gradually to be regarded as the crown and purpose of existence. They were ends in themselves, looking to nothing beyond : such time as a man could save from business he devoted eagerly to the 'occupations of the Muses.' *διαγωγή* was the name given to such

occupations—the only condition of ἀρετή, or worth.

“Habit and training may turn out good fighting machines and produce by mechanical means virtuous citizens, just as dogs and other animals can be disciplined to obedience; but it is not till reason and reflection appear that education of a moral kind can be said to begin.

“When once the habit of enquiry arose in Athens it ran like an epidemic through the State. The Sophists, with their subtly dissolvent questions, helped to destroy received institutions and sanctions, and brought individualism to the birth. Philosophy and science and fine art came to be regarded as apart from—even opposed to—the dull routine of citizenship. Whereas bodily training had been paramount, it was now neglected for the Sophists’ schools.

“Even before the Persian wars the old myths which had constituted the religion of the country were beginning to be discredited. The mystery investing the religious rites with such ethical character as they possessed was vanishing before the inflooding beams of enquiry and reflection. The old theology was undermined; and the famous dictum of the Sophists, ‘man is the measure of all things,’ was but the forerunner announcing the loosing of the material ties which

held ancient society together. The old education appeared narrow and mistaken; reality seemed to lie in an unseen world of ideas—Plato's 'things in themselves.'

"The round of civic duties, contrasted with the inner world of contemplation, was regarded not only as a lower existence, but actually as an evil to be escaped from. 'Worth' ceased to be the aim of education, and happiness took its place. It is not only in the retrospect that we discern herein the disintegrating influence which contributed so greatly to the downfall of the small Greek States: it was recognised and deplored by the leaders of contemporary thought. Aristophanes vainly directed his satire and Pericles his statesmanship to its correction. Socrates, too, was aware of the danger; but he none the less contributed to precipitate it. It was in his scrutiny of the Sophists' teaching that he made his great discovery—that though man is the measure of all things, he is so only so far as he shares in the common intelligence, which is the true subject of all truth. In other words, he brought to light the universality of intelligence.

"Moral autonomy he rightly saw to be the only condition of freedom; but he failed to find the means of investing it with a social character. Thus the practical influence of his teaching did



not differ from that of the Sophists in its solvent effect: for it strengthened the claims of the individual without showing how they could be made one with a complete civic scheme of life.

"Intellectualism, barren contemplation, withdrawal from the world was the result; and later on their effects are traceable in the asceticism of the early church and the mysticism of the Neo-Platonists.

"Socrates lost his life for refusing to countenance the traditional dogmas, which reason showed him to be based on superstition; and his influence was as disruptive of society as that of the Sophists. It was only by degrees, in the slow process of moral evolution, that his teaching came to bear fruit—if indeed even yet the harvest is fully gathered in. Its immediate result was to encourage the production of 'self-poised men, thinking for themselves, and choosing their own mode of life,' rather than of dutiful citizens given up to public affairs. He had inaugurated the eve of moral freedom, but at a heavy cost to the State."

"I do not quite understand how," I interrupted.

"Because this exalting of *διαγωγή* into an ideal for life loosened the ties which bound the citizen to the State, and in encouraging him to hold aloof from practical affairs, hastened the downfall of the

Republics. From fashioning only citizens the Greeks proceeded to the enthronement of the individual. Loss of independence was indirectly the result—the price paid for the conception of moral freedom ; a price which, heavy as it looked at the time, looks small enough now in the light of the benefits which the world has reaped from it. What was the separate life of a few small republics in comparison with the liberation of humanity ? Man had acquired moral autonomy for the first time in history. There had risen above the horizon a new star whose beams were to grow in magnitude until all the dark vapours of ignorance and superstition were dispersed—a star that is still slowly climbing the heavens towards the zenith, whence its vertical rays will finally penetrate all the dark places of the earth. Dazzled by the discovery, what wonder if the Greeks readily sacrificed to it their religion, their country and their traditions ? ”

“ But is not our danger just as great if we too set up *διαγωγή* as an ideal to be aimed at ? ”

“ The world then was yet in its infancy,” he replied ; “ its self-consciousness was as imperfect as that of a child. Looking back over a long adolescence, we can mark the ebb and flow of progress, and avoid, if we will, the errors into which those pioneers of civilisation fell. There

could no longer be any question now of substituting the contemplative for the actual ideal as a practical rule of life. We, too, are as anxious to secure for the individual complete moral autonomy; but we recognise that it is only through his social existence—his relations to family, district and country—that he can hope to attain it. We see that man is a social being who can only reach his full development in society, which thus becomes the expression of the higher rationality of each of its members. With the lessons of history to guide us, we recognise the evils of withdrawal from the struggle of life, even without following it to such extremes as the asceticism of early Christianity, the dreamy mysticism of the Neo-Platonists or the Brahmins.

“The question is thus no longer one of exchanging activity for meditation, but of seeing that our activity is rightly directed and based on well-considered principles. A coherent and rational synthesis of the facts of the universe can alone afford such principles; and though this is still beyond the reach of the mass of mankind, it is the logical goal at which the work of Socrates must eventually find completion. I believe firmly that in proportion as the development of the reflective powers becomes the aim of education mankind will receive its final emancipation from prejudice,

superstition, and convention, and enter into its heritage of complete moral freedom. In so far as it may contribute to bring this result about we must clearly welcome the spread of the leaven of contemplation in our society."

## CHAPTER IX

### AIMS AND CHOICE OF WORK

"APPLYING the principle to yourself," I suggested after a pause, "you think that you are justified in devoting your energies to help in spreading it? Well, if by now they were convinced that you have no desire to escape from the responsibilities of your station, I suppose that our jury of men of the world might possibly acquit you."

"I think," he answered, "that I am not merely justified but bound. And perhaps I ought really to care less about their good opinion; but human nature is weak."

"The ultimate test must be sincerity of intention. He who honestly believes that he can serve his fellows best in a life withdrawn from the world is in a widely different case from him who shrinks from discharging the duties demanded of him in the rough and tumble of life, and chooses the life of contemplation as a means of escape. We saw that self-realisation was not only a condition of

freedom, but of complete civic service. Each individual has to prove :—first that such self-realisation can best be attained by the life he deliberately chooses ; and secondly, that his contribution is, not perhaps such as he alone can make (though that, be it remembered, would be the ideal) but at least conducive, directly or indirectly to the common weal. That is my ambition : and however closely I search, I cannot find in it any trace of a desire to shirk life's responsibilities. True, I was out of harmony with my environment and its aims and ambitions : but my desire to escape from them was largely promoted by the hope that in a more congenial field of work I might be able to turn my powers to better account. I believe such aptitudes as I possess to be of an order which our practical and utilitarian stage of civilisation needs. A profound love of beauty leads me to look upon Art as one of the most potent of civilising agents. Philosophy I regard as essential to the formation of morally autonomous human beings ; and to the spread of such ideas I intend to devote my energies."

"They will point out," I said, "that these are unsupported statements, of the nature rather of aspiration than of achievement. Indeed, in the very nature of the case, it is only in the final summing up that a verdict can be recorded. But

I dare say that they will give you credit for honesty in your professions—involving as they do the renunciation of most of what the world sets highest store by.”

He sat for a while in silence.

“How best a man is to attain self-realisation no living soul but himself is in a position to decide. Whether his proposed course of life will contribute to the common weal is a matter which is equally incapable of direct or mathematical proof. If practical achievement capable of demonstration is to be the test, the men I speak of will assuredly rank below any successful stockbroker or speculator. But surely success, achieved and recognised, is *not* the test? It is a rough and ready—aye, commonly, the only available, measure in the world’s hands. But where delicate ethical considerations come in, we must have a finer balance for the weighing. Are we to lay it down that success in any walk of life is better than failure in any other? Are we to say that there may not be noble failures or ignoble successes?”

“Even the most practical of plain men would hesitate to go as far as that, I suppose,” was my answer. “This is assuredly a question where motive must be taken into account before we can deliver judgment. ‘It is the aim that matters, not the achievement,’ said Stevenson: and there have

been few manlier or more inspiring creeds than his."

"I should like you," he said, "to pause for a moment and consider the practice of the majority of those who adopt the rough and ready standard of apparent success or failure. What do we find when we ask the question, how most men choose their profession?"

"In the most cases (I do not speak of those where strict necessity decides, but where the element of choice enters) can we say that the choice is dictated by principles deliberately thought out and acted on? or will it appear that chance has generally given the casting vote?"

As I kept silence, he went on:

"What is known as a 'vocation' is rare: that we must begin by admitting. How often do we not see the average public-school boy, when questioned upon the choice of his future calling, reduced to a state of perplexity which would be amusing if it did not reflect so damagingly on our whole conception of the purpose of education. Apart from such as step into an inherited, ready-made position, and such as are definitely drawn in some particular direction, the remainder, who are the majority, seem, in England at anyrate, to get distributed among the different walks of a life in a manner purely haphazard.



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"There are certain definite receptacles for the well-to-do young in search of occupation—Army, Bar, Church, Civil Service are the chief. But those whom the stress of competition excludes from the more obvious of the employments available must seek to place their talents further afield: and though there is practically no longer any limit to the occupations deemed worthy of what is termed a 'gentleman,' still the ill-adjusted relations of supply and demand frequently appear to make the search a puzzling one. It is often complicated by the fact that the motive is less the desire to find a field where powers may receive full scope than one offering the best opportunities for a 'good time.'

"The point however is that in the majority of cases the determining factor is to be found in any direction rather than that of a definite leaning. We find round pegs fitted into square holes, because of the necessity for doing something, and the absence of any particular bias."

"My dear sir," I exclaimed, "surely all this is inseparable from the struggle for life? it is only exceptional individuals who have vocations; and, since opportunities for original work are rare, the average man is as capable of being trained for one profession as for another."

"I admit it," he answered. "Whether or not

it could be bettered by seeking to make education inculcate a different conception of life's duties, the broad fact remains that in most cases it is not any pronounced leaning which decides upon the choice of a profession. Even in the highest sphere of all, that of Government, it would hardly be contended that it is abstract patriotism or the conviction of an innate capacity for rule which leads our legislators to seek election. We can hardly suppose, for example, that every man who aspires to direct the affairs of a great Empire is qualified to do so by either or both of these motives. If it were so the House of Commons would be a very different place, though possibly a less representative one! Actually it is, as everyone knows, most commonly the possession of wealth or inherited position, social ambition, the love of power and consideration, or similar motives, which account for the presence there of at least half its members. So even here we find the controlling causes to be other than natural bias or qualification.

"Now let me state my case again—

"A man does best when his work is that to which he feels most strongly drawn. In the majority of professions this is not the case: their adoption is a matter of chance or necessity. What I might fairly contend, then, is that since my plan

of life is the result of deliberate thought, with definite aims in conscious relation to a conceived whole, my chances of contributing to that whole are at least as good as in cases of more haphazard selecting."

"Advocates of the gospel of success," I said, "would answer, that judgment by results is the only fair test; and they would doubtless challenge you, and challenge you unanswerably, to produce any practical achievement to set beside the sum of dull but necessary duties which are being discharged for the world by its millions of humdrum workers."

"It is obvious," he replied, "that the direct evidence required for such a defence is difficult of production. At the best I could but claim an indirect advantage to others resulting from my work. But listen how the matter is summed up by a modern thinker concisely and as it seems to me fairly :

"There remains . . . an ideal, the realisation of which is recognised as a moral duty, but which yet in its essence does not involve direct relation to other men. The realisation for *myself of truth and beauty*, the living for the self which in the apprehension, the knowledge, the sight and the love of them finds its true being, is (all those who know the meaning of the words will bear me out)

a *moral obligation*, which is not felt as such only so far as it is too pleasant.

“‘It is a moral duty for the artist or the enquirer to lead the life of one, and a moral offence when he fails to do so. But on the other hand it is impossible, without violent straining of the facts, to turn these virtues into social virtues, or duties to my neighbour. No doubt such virtues do as a rule lead indirectly to the welfare of others, but this is not enough to make them social; their social bearing is indirect, and does not lie in their very essence. The end they aim at is a single end of their own, the content of which does not necessarily involve the good of other men. This we can see from supposing the opposite. . . .

“‘The pursuit of these ends, apart from what they lead to, is approved as morally desirable, not perhaps by the theory, but I think by the instinctive judgment, of all persons worth considering. . . .

“‘Nothing is easier than to suppose a life of Art or Speculation which, as far as we can see, though true to itself, has, so far as others are concerned, been sheer waste or even loss, and which knew that it was so. This is a fairly supposable case, and no one, I think, can refuse to enter on it. Was the life immoral? I say, No, it was not *therefore* immoral, but may have been *therefore* moral past ordinary morality.’

"I can hardly put my point of view more clearly than that : though I think I might with reason prefer a claim to something more than indirect results. I likened myself, as you perhaps remember, to one pointing out the way to the gate of the temple,—a would-be interpreter and exponent. In this if I proved successful, might I not fairly claim a social bearing ? True, incidental, rather than essential to my choice ; but none the less of direct value to the community ? I should word my defence somewhat as follows :

" "You challenge me with withdrawing from life, evading my responsibilities ; with lack of spirit and ambition. You bid me re-enter the ranks and struggle for the prizes with the rest. You exalt the successful and hold them up to me as an example.

" "But I deny the validity of your test and I repudiate the avowed materialism of your aims. I dispute the superiority of the man who, having made a large fortune by his wit or his industry, considers himself justified in spending it on the indulgence of his own or his family's caprices.

" "I maintain that an existence lived throughout from hand to mouth—flung at random into the choice of work and thereafter so busied with the cares of money-getting, clothing, feeding and

putting-by, that such things come to seem the sole end and aim of existence—differs only in degree from that of the higher animals. Life must be more than an endless round of toiling, eating, sleeping and begetting others to follow in the same track from the cradle to the grave. And such—deny it as you will—is all that countless lives amount to : a dreary mechanical business, to be assessed solely by the more or less of wealth accumulated during their transit.

“ ‘I believe in the choice, open-eyed and deliberate, of a life’s work contrived with a full consciousness of responsibility in relation to the whole scheme of things : and I believe that it should be the aim of Education to qualify men for this choice—I believe that of such education Philosophy is the very kernel.

“ ‘I believe in the value of leisure, put to good account ; in the civilising power of Art rightly conceived ; and of the genuineness of my creed, my action in renouncing so much that the world esteems must be the earnest. By the spread of Knowledge, Art and Philosophy alone can the hard-and-fastness of life be resolved, and the atmosphere of beauty diffused about its crude outlines.

“ ‘There is work and to spare, for such as seek to reveal to a few of those disheartened by the

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dull round of existence, the significance lying behind hard and grinding facts: to touch into sudden life a thousand simple unsuspected beauties: in a word, to lift the veil from the spirit of universal Poetry.' ”

## CHAPTER X

### PHILOSOPHY

I REFLECTED for a while in silence before I answered.

"Philosophy, Knowledge, Art!" I said at last, "these are things of vague import to the multitude, I fear: and even if attainable little suited to its use. Supposing that you succeed in putting these ideas into common men, so that each is qualified to choose his life-work in the full consciousness of 'his relation to the whole scheme of things,' how do you expect to get the world's drudgery done? You will but make government impossible. Imagine every bootblack prating of Art, or philosophising about his place in the scheme of things! And what proportion of mankind do you believe to be born with special leanings and aptitudes? How many boys, rich or poor, do you imagine capable of weighing all the considerations you wish them to take into account, at the moment when the choice of their profession comes to be made?"



"These are grave practical difficulties, indeed," he answered, "the gravest that face, not perhaps our own generation, but that which is next to follow it. But not even the unanimous opinion of the world's practical statesmen would suffice to convince me that they are completely insurmountable.

"True, reflection *is* a solvent; but it only loosens to build firmer. It is a reproductive and continuous process, of unending recurrence, as the clouds are updrawn from the ocean to descend in moisture upon the earth and rejoin the ocean again. It uses the old material anew, but refaced and in a firmer setting.

"It is true enough, too, that the majority of men are born without special leanings or aptitudes; but for this very reason the world's plain work will continue to be conducted very much as it is at present. With this difference: that even the humblest of tastes derives a dignity intrinsically lacking to it, so soon as it comes to be regarded as a small but essential part of a great and all-inclusive whole.

" 'Let the great soul,' said Emerson, 'incarnated in some woman's form, poor and sad and single, in some Dolly or Joan, go out to service, and sweep chambers and scour floors, and its effulgent day-beams cannot be muffled or hid, but to sweep

and scour will instantly appear supreme and beautiful actions, the top and radiance of human life, and all people will get mops and brooms.' The dignity that a great soul may reflect upon a humble task may equally shine through it when it is recognised as the radiant symbol of all service. Make even the meanest worker conscious of this, and you will straightway lend a background to his life which will strengthen him to transcend some of the crudest of the crude facts that draw him down and confine him within the limits of the material.

"It is the finite which cramps and stunts. Open any window on to a beyond and the beams of hope and courage will come flooding through it. The drudgery will be accomplished then, as now, by those without special aptitudes; but in how different a spirit, if it ceases to be regarded as in itself the end and aim of life!

"As to the average boy's capacity for choice, it is, of course, if unaided, non-existent. In very few cases can a boy possess the necessary outlook, the necessary balance, to qualify him to choose for himself. But this is precisely the responsibility of those charged with his education. Those who are equipped with fuller knowledge, and see the facts of life framed in a comprehensive setting, are in a position so to present these facts in their broad outlines that even the young may feel themselves

bound up with, and accountable to, a whole lying beyond their own immediate interests and desires. Were this one of the chief aims of Education the means would certainly be found to accomplish it.

- A sense of life's responsibility would be the fine flower in which all the careful tending of education should come to perfection: without it, how can existence be aught but a haphazard and aimless wandering?"

"But how, in practice, would you proceed?" I asked. "Surely the stern and relentless conditions of the struggle for life put Philosophy, Art, and Knowledge so far beyond the reach of average mankind as to make them inaccessible. Is it not hopeless to try to bring them into close relation with the hard facts of the worker's humdrum existence?"

"As to philosophy," he replied, "there is no gainsaying that its name is a stumbling-block, and those who profess it are regarded with suspicion. But *is* the thing in itself the empty mystification it is so often represented?"

"What does philosophy mean? Reduced to its essence, it is simply the effort to comprehend the universe as a whole. Most of us see it piecemeal—see that fragment of it only which is framed by the circumstances of our lives. But that does not prevent our speculating about it: hardly any

one but, in vague and stumbling fashion, indulges at times in some sort of reflection on the meaning of things. Only, for want of training or knowledge, from insufficient or mistaken data, we are apt to set out upon the wrong path. Even the few steps which it is possible for us to take are not taken in the right direction, unless with the training of some elementary thinking to guide us.

"Philosophy's contention is, that any thinking which is done at all should be done thoroughly, so far as it goes.

"The man who prides himself on taking a practical commonsense view of life can hardly be induced to regard any such thinking as other than a waste of time. The actual buying and selling, sowing and reaping, scheming and saving, which necessarily occupy so much of our waking energies, come to seem to him the sole purpose of existence. They need all, and more than all, our attention ; to direct any of it elsewhere is simply to court failure.

"Any speculating about the meaning of life, duty, responsibility, and the like questions, if it has to be done at all, can be done, he thinks, on Sundays from the pulpit : such matters have no more connection with work-a-day existence than the Millennium.

“Nevertheless, we profess a belief in human perfectibility and progress ; for what else underlies all legislation, and the utterances both of statesmen and the press ? Not a day but you will find in the columns of any leading paper the implied recognition of principles higher than we are yet able to put in practice. What but proof of this is the charge of hypocrisy so often laid to our door ?

“That which, by implication, we accept, should we not be in a position to test for ourselves ? Since every step we take in our social life has reference to certain assumed underlying principles, should we not endeavour to qualify ourselves for their first-hand investigation ? We are born and trained up in the shackles of convention and authority, and without the power of reflection we remain their slaves—‘mere play-actors in life, bound to play a traditional, unreal part, without any of the glorious liberty of the children of God, of them who see the Divine face to face, and in the light thereof all things in their true worth.’ We are at the mercy of dogmatism, whether it be that of orthodox theology or modern materialism—either alone an equally unsatisfactory guide to the riddle of the universe. Philosophy—the power of correct thinking—is our sole safeguard. Nor is it beyond the reach of ordinary men.

"I do not mean that it is either desirable or possible for the ordinary man to become a practical metaphysician, versed in all the many different systems of philosophy and capable of defending his own against the rest. That would indeed be a counsel of perfection—and of how many professed metaphysicians can it be said to be true? Such proficiency must remain a matter for specialists. But adhering to the definition of philosophy with which we started as 'the effort to comprehend the universe as a whole,' we shall see that for the ordinary man's purpose much less will be adequate. What is the essential thing? He must be led to ask himself the question, what he is, whence he is, and whither he is going—questions that we most of us so easily and habitually put aside. That he may attempt to answer them the first requisite is that he should be furnished with some general outlook over the broad lines of human knowledge. In other words, he must have some knowledge of the science of evolution. The old unscientific views on which the earlier religions rested are doomed; if religion is to survive, if life is still to be divinely leavened and saved from submergence in the sordid and vulgar, the underlying world-views must be scientific. Ours must be some such standpoint as will enable a man to trace the path of our planet through

countless aeons across the heavens, follow it as it passes from nebular to solid ; watch the slow stages of its growth, the displacements of continents and oceans, the upheaval of mountains, the birth of rivers, the gradual rise of life through elementary forms. He must be led to recognise that all these are but scenes in one great continuous drama in which we play our infinitesimal part—still, perhaps, in an initial Act.

“ He must thus see how we are connected with every form of life upon earth, including that of the plants, and through them, with the world we call inanimate. He must know something of the rise and fall of nations, the character of earlier civilisations, of other constitutions and religions. He must be able to follow the slow up-climbing of intelligence from the first glimmerings of instinct to self-consciousness, the birth of reason, and the conception of moral liberty. So that here too, weighing the changes that have come to pass since history began to write its records, and seeing how brief is the span thus covered in comparison with the unnumbered ages of our earth's existence, he may take heart and be not discouraged when men speak slightly of progress or of the potentialities of human destiny.

“ So that we realise that the process is one,

continuous, progressive, with man's spiritual perfection as its goal, and that we have our own part to play in it, what matters it that beginning and end are wrapped in mystery?

"We sum up in our being all the results of the Past: we make it intelligible as the oak explains the acorn.

"To give some such general conception as this is surely not beyond the reach of education. There is no need to specialise. The facts can be so set forth in their broad outlines that he who had made them his own would find himself raised above the narrow world of actualities to an eminence commanding fair prospects and a wide horizon. If not a philosopher in the narrow sense he would at least have reached a plane of general conceptions rich in practical influence on his life.

"Is this an ideal altogether out of reach?

"Is it actually more than a step forward, the logical outcome of the decision that education should be general?

"When does man's nature so nearly attain its highest capabilities as in his desire to know, to understand?

"Some in one way and some in others, we seem to touch and have communion with what is beyond the visible world. In various manners we find something higher, which both supports and



humbles, both chastens and transports us. And, with certain persons, the intellectual effort to understand the universe is a principal way of thus experiencing the Deity.'

"The intellectual effort to understand the universe must perforce vary with the intellect; but provided it be sincere and that its foundations, however rudimentary, be sound, it may lay claim to the title of philosophy. And though it be as yet beyond the reach of the majority, can we be content that it should remain so without avowing that we desire to keep education for the few?"

"That certainly seems unanswerable," I admitted. "Even the Tory party nowadays would be unable to contest it on public platforms, though they would certainly feel as doubtful as I confess I do about the possibility, or even the advisability, of carrying it into practice. Still, if I accepted your definition of philosophy, I suppose I cannot reasonably decline to admit that a wider diffusion of it would be to the general advantage. And that involves the further admission, which I suppose you want, that in helping to diffuse it a man may find full scope for his energies?"

He smiled.

"I will not push you too far: I only want a

tolerant and unprejudiced consideration of my position."

"Well," I said, "this is not the place to ask how you mean actually to set to work. As regards the aim you have in view, I admit myself converted."

## CHAPTER XI

### ART

“AND about Art?”

“I believe,” he said, “that it is equally possible to bring home its practical bearing : to show that the lives of plain men may not only be enriched by it but are starved for lack of it—that it is within reach of all, were their eyes opened that they should see. At any rate I shall endeavour here again to make good my claim to usefulness as interpreter and exponent.

“What is the aim of Art? It is to store up for us in permanent form what is else fleeting and evanescent—to hold to our eyes a divining glass in which we may discern the forms of beauty amid the kaleidoscopic shifting of phenomena—to body forth heroic deeds and noble characters, so that they be not lost, but remain clearly pictured for the permanent and leisurely admiration of mankind.

“It is so from the highest to the lowest form of

artistic creativeness—from the great tragic types hewn for us by an Aeschylus or a Shakespeare, and the shapes of faultless beauty of which Praxiteles and Phidias have left us the immortal moulds, to the studies of humble peasant life with which a Millet or a Segantini have enriched our consciousness. In Greece, and again through the middle ages, as we may see illustrated in the decoration of the Gothic church, Art was the sole educator,—not intentionally, but actually. It educated by compelling attention on certain selected aspects of things which forthwith belonged to the category of the Beautiful. Thus it was continually enriching the consciousness even of the common people. Now it has almost entirely ceased to play that part:—it has never recovered, perhaps, from the Puritan onslaught ; or it is overshadowed by the world's great industrial and material advance. For three hundred years at any rate its influence has been steadily waning ; and to-day it has almost as little bearing on the life of the ordinary man as philosophy, and less than religion. When it counts at all, it is as a pastime, rather than as a serious interest or a civilising factor. It is a truism to say that we prefer variety entertainments to plays, newspapers and magazines to literature, pictures with a story or a moral to the single-minded effort to see and represent. The 'plain,

commonsense' type of Englishman of whom we spoke would scoff at the suggestion that Art may concern humanity as vitally as politics. Because its field of action is elsewhere, because he cannot immediately estimate its results, he would deny its validity. He does not see that we can no more compute its value in terms of ethics than we can express qualities of mind in terms of three dimensions.

"Its worth is substantive, self-existent. It seeks, by the expression of beauty, to evoke an emotion that is pure and disinterested: its value is not inferior to that of any other kind of human excellence. It is self-sufficing, ignorant of moral purpose. And yet even moral good could easily be shown to be the result of great Art.

"Listen again to Shelley:

"'A man to be greatly good,' he says, 'must imagine intensely and comprehensively: he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause.'

"This profound truth lies at the root of the whole matter: imagine comprehensively; put yourself in the place of others; understand their lives and the problems they have to face; and

understanding, judge mercifully. To understand is to forgive.

“‘Homer,’ he goes on, ‘embodied the ideal perfection of his age in human character, nor can we doubt that those who read his verses were awakened to an ambition of becoming like to Achilles, Hector and Ulysses; the truth and beauty of friendship, patriotism and persevering devotion to an object, were unveiled to their depths in these immortal creations; the sentiments of the auditors must have been refined and enlarged by a sympathy with such great and lovely impersonations, until from admiring they imitated, and from imitation they identified themselves with the objects of their admiration.’

“How can we fail to recognise that the effect which Shelley here ascribes to the poetry of Homer holds good in greater or less degree of all true Art?

“No sooner does he state the matter thus than we feel its truth. No one whose understanding has been kindled by great Art can lack insight into the situations or sympathy with the characters, whose presentment has touched his imagination.

“Who does not feel his heart go out to Hamlet? Who would rebuke Falstaff? Who but loves Antony? Our sympathies expand; we quicken towards the generous and noble, and long

to imitate. We sigh with the pitiful and weep with those that mourn; and at the sight of vileness that might be our own we shrink back—perhaps at the very brink of the precipice. ‘There, but for the grace of God, goeth John Bunyan.’

“Sympathy, admiration; these are the steps which lead up towards emulation. To know Sir Roger de Coverley is to be penetrated with the grace of that old world courtliness which springs from the heart. It is in such pictures that we seek our models. Do we wish to call up some image typical of English manhood, what could serve us better than the names of Beauchamp or Adam Bede or Gabriel Oak?

“Why multiply instances? All book-lovers can supply from the treasure-house where their favourites are enshrined a long list of personalities that have not only beguiled their leisure moments, but deepened their comprehension of life?

“Real men, or characters in fiction, what is the odds so that the imagination be kindled? Tom Jones, Warrington, Clive Newcome, Rushworth, Levine, Bazaroff; they are as real to us as Raleigh or Pitt; they are true to the life, in their weaknesses as in their virtues—fashioned of the clay from which original humanity was shaped. Do we not know all women better for having known

Manon and Anna Karénine, Natasha, Miss Mattie, Kirstie, Dinah Morris, and Emma Bovary? Has not kinship with Mrs. Bennett or Miss Bates lent the redeeming touch of humour to many a tedious acquaintance?

"These people were drawn with no moral purpose; yet the very laying bare of their life's mechanism by an artist hand suffices to engender in others a deeper humanity, and thence directly to influence character."

"Influence character!" I exclaimed. "Do you seriously believe that? You think that a work of fiction, springing from the imagination—a thing of air, the baseless fabric of a vision—can really have any effect upon character? If anything at all result, it can surely only be false views of life; for those who are steeped in fiction commonly look through other's spectacles rather than their own eyes."

"It would be true to say that of bad art," he answered, "assuming that anything deserving the name of Art can be bad—but not of good."

"Cheap fiction, cheap melodrama, cheap art—substitutes generally; these do indeed work harm, and harm immeasurable. But a little reflection will convince you that the influence of great Art for good is no less potent."

"If character can be influenced at all, which I



sometimes doubt," I said, "it is certainly by quite other things than fiction."

"But consider a moment," he answered; "what are the things that influence character? or rather, what are the things that do *not* influence it?"

"Can we say that any influence with which we come in contact fails to contribute to that conglomerate of feelings, opinions, instincts, impulses and aspirations of which our personality is composed. We start with perceptions, by means of which we come to disentangle our consciousness slowly from its environment. Heredity gives to the matter which is the envelope of that consciousness a certain bias. At first the merely animal instincts rooted in matter dominate us. Then comes education, to teach us how to subdue instinct and appetite, and substitute ideal for animal nature. Thus we are brought to habits of renunciation and self-control. How does education proceed? How otherwise than by *putting into us* ideas?"

"This, I know well, is dire heresy to those who believe that our development is merely the unfolding of possibilities latent within us in embryonic form; who believe that we grow as a plant unfolds, and that no outside influence can introduce what does not already exist; in fact, that inborn character cannot be changed—that the

whole question is one of 'drawing out' and not of 'putting in.'

"But let us consider the matter by the light of concrete instances.

"How is a Unitarian made, or an Anabaptist? a Hegelian or a Primitive Methodist? Do people start with the germs of those beliefs latent in them, or are they implanted by contact from without? Are we born to Socialism or Atheism? If so, what can education hope to do at all? Individuality in that case is purely a matter of heredity, upon which environment has little or no influence. But can we seriously contend that the boy bred in the slums, whose circle of ideas is bounded by squalor, ill-usage and neglect, with the gin-palace and the low music-halls to represent pleasure, is as likely to turn out well, to become a good citizen, as the boy who has lived among healthful influences, familiar with nature in all her moods and manifestations, in daily contact with noble ideas and the great creative works of man's mind? That in both cases the usual exceptions occur does not affect the probabilities, which no observer endowed with ordinary commonsense can dispute.

"Will any one who can think himself back again to infancy question the extraordinary receptivity and plasticity of a child's mind? We can all trace to their starting-point in definite utter-

ances, occurrences, or impressions, tendencies towards which more and more the whole of life has come to lean.

"The whole point of difference between man and the higher animals is that the mind of the former is plastic and unceasingly undergoing alteration, as the result of its impact with circumstances, with other minds, and the ideas springing from other minds. Were it otherwise we should have to say that the laws of moral evolution are identical with those of biological evolution.

"Hear Herbart, the great pioneer of modern educational ideas: 'Man, capable of becoming, as you will, a wild animal or personified reason, and formed incessantly by circumstances, needs an art which shall build him up and construct him in order that he may receive the form that is right.'

"Nor does this plasticity, though it lessens as habit forms, ever disappear. The individuality is shaped by the interaction of the new influences, which enter the environment from minute to minute, with the whole amalgam of past experience. At any moment a new external fact, *or idea*, may divert personality into a fresh channel; and up to a certain period of life it is ideas rather than occurrences that count the most.

"Up to thirty, or thereabouts, character is still

being formed, and the mind, its imitative and receptive powers still active, is sending out tendrils on every side in search of nourishment. Suspicious as youth is of any direct attempt to administer morality to it, it is correspondingly receptive of ideas that are large and sane and vigorous, when they are embodied in living impersonations, real or imaginary. A strong artistic impression, indeed, even in later life, has the power of influencing conduct, and thereby character. It is in the drama, where the appeal through vision is direct, and the currents passing from mind to mind tend to the quicker kindling of imagination, that we can see this most easily. That the stage may have an educative influence—‘cathartic’ where the tragic emotions are in play, sanely corrective where the comic spirit laughs at our shams or pettiness—is a truth that we are slowly learning, thereby creeping back once more into the ideas of the Greeks.

“Fiction,” he continued, “exercises a less direct but more pervasive force; for the novel to-day is in every hand. Who can attempt to question its influence both on manners and conduct?”

“It was to Sir Walter Scott’s novels that Newman traced the starting-point of his life’s activity. The cynicism of M. de Camors is said to have affected a whole generation of Frenchmen. The

influence of Byron and Bulwer will at once occur to everyone. Tolstoi, by his power to create men and women that live and breathe, has led thousands to follow him into his subsequent wanderings through the dim paths of mysticism and anarchy. Robert Elsmere probably did more to unsettle opinion than a decade of purely scientific writing.

“The novel has access to a far wider circle of readers than any literature serious enough to demand a sustained effort of thought. That it is without influence clearly cannot be argued ; and that its influence, owing to want of discrimination on the part of readers, is not always proportioned to the artistic merit, is equally indisputable. What I contend, in short, is, that Art, and particularly the literary Art, so far from being inaccessible to the average man of all classes, is in practice, and whether he knows it or not, always affecting both his actions and his character. And further, that for lack of proper training he is as likely to be influenced by bad art as by good ; and that thus he needs guidance. And such guidance lastly, he can only hope to receive from those who have made it their business to investigate, in its first principles, what to him is but a pastime. Let me borrow an illustration from painting. A landscape by Constable or Corot will arrest attention upon effects of light, or shade

or colour ; upon wondrous patterns of line in structure of tree or mountain, or the grouping of cloud-masses, on which, when before us in nature, we may often have gazed unheedingly. Our eyes once opened, we go back to nature with a clearer vision ; we have taken a step towards seeing as a master sees. It is well known to men of science that the eye is capable of training to the apprehension of gradations of colour totally indistinguishable to the untrained ; just as the ear of a musician can seize sub-divisions of tones or single out one instrument from a full orchestra, in a way inexplicable to the layman. So, doubtless, the mind can be led, through imagination, to such readiness of perception and sympathy as to respond instantly to any human appeal.

“For this kindling of imagination there can be no livelier—and, indeed, no other instrument—than Art—but Art that can be hall-marked and certified worthy of the name.

“And it is here that without some training we are at the mercy of the spurious and the plausible.

“Except, perhaps, in the case of the greatest Art of all, we carry no natural touchstone with us whereby we may at once tell false from true. On the contrary, our instinct leads us towards the crude and the photographic. To see this we need

but to think of the decoration of village churches in Catholic countries, of the love of children and peasants for bright colours. To read the language of Art in its countless dialects needs long study and thought—demands not only insight but powers of comparison and reflection. In Art, more than in any other field of human activity, we need interpreters. Education as a rule is perforce too rough and ready to teach us criticism ; and the conditions of practical life, for most of us, stunt rather than foster such critical faculty as we possess."

"But surely," I interrupted, "there are already professed and accredited critics, and to spare?"

"It is true," he answered, "but I contend that there is also room for voluntary and independent workers, less likely, from their very detachment, to be betrayed into dogmatism. Where are they to be found but among such as have passed their lives in close communion with beauty, prompt to waylay her in every mood, to abandon themselves freely to her every manifestation ; yet subjecting impressions in the aloofness of cool afterthought, to the test of rigid analysis and comparison ? Their's it is to be not only the upholders of old standards, the exponents and eulogists of works which are none the less beautiful for having stood the test of ages ; but pioneers to the new regions to which Art is ever advancing. They must judge

- new by reference to old ; and old, viewed afresh, will often enough be found taking on enhanced significance from the new.

“Without sympathetic interpretation, a little timely enthusiasm, perhaps a tinge of hero-worship, Art that is unfamiliar or unheralded may (as indeed it only too often does) come still-born into the world. Socrates called himself the midwife of ideas ; Art, too, needs similar help : and in this sphere all who love beauty may play a humble but a useful part.

“I have attempted to defend the thesis that neither Philosophy nor Art need be inaccessible to the ordinary man. Even if it is conceded that these rare flowers of human intellect are still beyond the reach of most of those whose lives are spent in the harder forms of manual work, I shall have shown, if my argument carry any weight, that for the classes which enjoy a larger share of the world’s material goods they stand waiting to be plucked. And further, it is these classes precisely that are most in need of them : for improvement must begin at the top—a truism that, often as it is repeated, we are as far as ever from making the foundation of our practice.

“Do you remember a passage in the second book of Aristotle’s *Politics*, where, discussing the question of communism and private property, he



contends that possession ought to be private, but that the citizens of a community should be so well educated as to be ready to use their wealth for the public weal? 'And to see that they have this education is the proper task of the legislator.'

"It is the same with Art. With a completer education the citizens would feel its need; but such an education must begin above. And it is the business of the legislator, as many think, to see that it is given.

"*'Il faut éclairer les classes éclairées,'* said Flaubert. '*Commencez par la tête, c'est ce qui est le plus malade, le reste suivra.*'

"For none indeed is there greater need for Philosophy, and for a sense of the civilising value of Art, than for those who rule. Were these things the commoner equipment of legislators, there would come about a widening of sympathies as swift to result in practical benefits as the circles to follow the plunge of a stone in water."

## CHAPTER XII

### KNOWLEDGE

"WELL," I said, seeing that he paused expectantly — "I admit that you have made out something of a case for Art, as you did for Philosophy. It is clear that the hard-and-fastness of common existence has got to be relaxed ; else there can be no hope of an advance. Without some background to relieve the crude materialism of the struggle, I see little advantage in all our efforts to improve the merely physical conditions of existence for those who toil. And you make me think that such a background could be provided. You coupled knowledge, I remember with the other means on which you counted : do you consider its extension as possible, and as desirable, as that of Art and Philosophy ?"

"It ought easily to be possible," he answered meditatively, "to make its absence felt as a want in lives of average men. That of course is the first step.

"All human beings share the same physical environment of earth and sky and water. Their world is built up of what their senses convey to them, and the interpretation that the mind puts upon these sense-impressions ; it is, in fact, to this extent the creation of mind.

"Thus the significance of life will vary in different people in the exact ratio of this creative power of their respective minds. Two men live side by side in the country, equipped with equal powers of vision and hearing. The one is aware that the sky is sometimes blue and at other times grey ; that the trees and grass are green ; that there are birds singing and nesting round him ; that at certain seasons certain flowers appear in the woods and hedgerows. Of the commoner trees and birds and flowers he probably knows the names. The other not only knows that sky is blue and grass green, but the explanation of these phenomena ; besides the appearance, he knows something of the song and habits of the birds. Of the structure of plants too, and how they are fertilised and reproduced, how they feed and breathe and are the links that connect the worlds of animal and mineral, he is not altogether ignorant. He may have a sufficient smattering of geology to hazard a conjecture concerning the origin of the soils or stones among which he lives ; some acquaintance

with the insect world and its bearing upon plant life and crops. For which of the twain will life be the fuller of interest? The one will walk with only partially awakened senses among sights and sounds that will be for the other a source of absorbing and perpetual pleasure. Yet each, *ex hypothesi*, has the same ears and eyes; it is the interpreting mind that differs; and this mind is as capable in the one case as in the other of being *taught* to see and hear and apprehend. Think of the richness of life in the one case, the poverty in the other; the absorbing interest, or the tedious monotony, of the same walk through country lanes taken by the one or the other. For it is on the *furnishing* of mind that the dignity and interest of life depend. Chance contact with a personality or an idea may cause the scales to fall from our eyes, and, to use a phrase we often hear, 'change the whole of life for us'; and that not merely metaphorically but literally. We can all think of instances where a sudden interruption coming athwart the tenour of life—an illness, it may be, or the loss of money, has had the same effect."

"It is quite true," I said, "I know a case in point—a country squire, whose interests up to middle life had been almost exclusively in one form of sport or another. A hunting accident laid him low for six months: he could not read:

and at last from sheer ennui he was driven to take up a pencil and try to draw. Unsuspected aptitudes speedily revealed themselves; he took to his new pursuit eagerly, and by the time he rose from his couch it was threatening dangerous rivalry to the old. Fresh vistas, too, were opened up. His own efforts led him to compare and study: he learnt to know the great masterpieces, sought out the society of painters, and ended by constructing for himself a new world of interests, which, but for an accident, he would, likely enough, never have discovered."

"Yes," he said, "it is a good instance of what I mean. In this case the transformation of a whole life was effected by what we must call chance. In others the same thing happens through contact with a rich personality. The point is, that what chance can do, can be done artificially and deliberately. We can set to work, in fact, to bring about an extension of the whole mental environment. For it is that rather than actual knowledge that is the goal. Life is so poor and narrow when it includes in its purview only immediate material requirements; it is so infinitely rich and varied in the potential backgrounds it offers. The whole field of human knowledge lies spread out around us; we may confine ourselves within a corner of it, to wander at random far and wide;

and once we have tasted of it, no mere horizon hemmed in by the hard-and-fastness of material fact will content us. Nor is our allotted work likely to suffer from being thrown into sudden relief against a wider background. Every fresh attempt to brighten the lives of workers in the big industries goes to prove the contrary; shorter hours and longer holidays have actually been found to result in a greater output."

"Knowledge is a word of somewhat wide significance," I suggested.

"I use it in its vaguest and most general sense," he replied. "There is no question of entering into rivalry with the expert; it will suffice to kindle interest and leave details to fill themselves in as they can. A hobby has been the saving of tedious lives innumerable; of what nature it is matters little. It may be, perhaps, an elementary acquaintance with any branch of science; it may be no more than a curiosity about the processes and products which constitute our material environment. For we walk blindfold through life. How many people either know or care anything about the printing of the books or newspapers they read? There are comparatively few of the objects we use, or of the institutions among which we live, of whose origin or working we have any notion. We take it all for granted, with never a

thought to how the whole machinery which makes existence so comfortable is provided. Government, justice, telegraphs, electricity and the banking system; we regard their functioning with equal ignorance and indifference, provided that no hitch occurs to interfere in a practical manner with our life.

"Here alone, among the concerns that touch us so closely, how easy it would be to provide subjects for study or investigation?

"Anything to *enrich* life; to lift us out of the dulling round of trivialities, and by connecting us with a larger whole, redeem the sordidness of the daily round. It is the mind which must be made to see, so as to interpret what the outward senses place before it.

"Let me state the point again:

"My contention, as in the case of Art and Philosophy, is that it is possible for rich and poor alike to enhance the significance of life by enlarging the outlook, and by providing a background which, in so far as it is the creation of mind, may be called ideal, but is in truth just as much a reality as the idea which lies behind and constitutes a newspaper, an Army or a Nation.

"The real unity of such things—a Club, let us say, an institution, a family or a church—is not such as can be seen or touched. What we can

see—the individual units, for example, which make up an army—do not constitute its reality, any more than individual copies constitute a newspaper. What we mean when we speak of the *Times* or the German Army is something largely the creation of our thought; an organisation, an ideal unity, arising from the co-operation of individual units to carry out a common purpose. Their real significance lies outside the world of sense: it is the construction of mind.

“Even the so-called realities, then, among which we live, and to the acceptance of which sturdy commonsense is apt to take a pride in limiting itself, turn out on investigation to be built up by mind.

“The regalia of a monarch have a symbolic meaning for grown-up people; for a child they are merely bright ornaments of metal and coloured stone. A savage chancing upon a gun lost by Europeans in a forest would see in it no more than a curious adjustment of wood and metal; of its uses, without the help of a mind better furnished than his own, he would remain ignorant; and what was devised for destruction would become for him a mere toy or a fetish.

“Even so it is with us and the phenomena among which we live. We are as the savage, idly fingering what might be of priceless import



to us were we but alive to its value. There is lacking to us the mind which can convert the inexplicable fabrication of metal and wood into an implement fit for use, which can read a new significance into all the familiar facts of earth and air and water among which we live unheeding. The material is there, ready for the creative power of mind to exercise itself upon; surely, then, it should be the chief aim of education, as it is the condition of all progress, to see that the power is aroused and brought into play?"

"Here, too," he continued, "the need is surely proved. The spread of Knowledge may rank, with Art and Philosophy, as solvent of the hard-and-fastness of crude fact; but the world must be taught to think so: the seed must be sown and diligently tended for fruit to ensue."

"Make clear the need, and improvement will not be long in coming. But the need can only be demonstrated by slow and patient steps, by wearisome iteration, by disregard of ridicule and contempt. Here, too, at least, there is work to be done and ample need for workers. Most pioneers of new conceptions, whether in Art or Music or Statecraft, have had to force them upon an unwilling public—witness Wagner, Wordsworth, Millet. Recognition, often enough, has hardly come to them during life. All the more need,

then for the enthusiasm of exponents and interpreters: for the sympathy and insight which can detect the promise of nascent art and make smooth the way for it: for the imagination which does not fear innovation and is prepared to risk failure in its acceptance of new ideas. And now I go a step further and maintain that this is also a life of Action; and that to draw the line so as to exclude would surely be mere arbitrariness.

“Must we call in the testimony of the senses to decide, and limit Action to the doing of things leading directly to practical results? Seeing that we found half our world of activities to be the construction of mind, we can hardly deny the name of Action to the process of fermentation from which ideas spring, though it be carried on in silence, far from the abode of men. Even those whose rôle seems merely a passive one, confined to the worship and admiration of what is beautiful, may be fostering a smouldering flame which will burst into fire later and cast its rays far out into the night.

“Rousseau’s pen helped to lay the train which a spark was soon to kindle into the fierce blaze of the Revolution: Darwin from his study shifted the centre of gravity which held all the beliefs of the western world in equilibrium. For mere humble followers of the illustrious there is work

that counts to do: and often ere now the chance seeds of wisdom caught by some patient tracker of a great man's footsteps have proved as fertile as those which Crusoe saved from the wreck."

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE SPIRIT OF POETRY

HE had more than once, as our discussion proceeded, read me extracts from a note-book in which he had set down many scattered thoughts—once intended, he confessed, as the material for a sort of apologia. I have already made some use of these notes: and in the pages which contain the conclusion of the whole matter he has allowed me to draw upon them more fully, as being a completer summing up of his argument than a mere record of conversations can afford. I have selected first a passage in which he illustrates by a parable his plea for the possibility of extending the whole mental environment.

"Our life journey," it runs, "is like the progress of settlers in an unexplored land. Each man makes his clearing in some patch of virgin forest, builds his hut, tills soil enough for the modest crops he needs to support life, and lays by what will serve him in time of necessity.

"So far all fare alike. But when one, having levelled his ground and extended it to the limit of his requirements, fences it round and settles down comfortably to enjoy its products and barter them with his neighbours; another will not rest satisfied to be so hemmed in but hews paths through the trees to east and west, north and south, seeking for an outlet. His neighbours mock him for the wasted toil that might have brought him in a double harvest; but he perseveres, and the paths creep further and further out into the tangled forest. At length he sees a lightness through the branches; his efforts redouble, and finally he comes out upon an opening at the edge of a plateau, from whence a vast extent of distant land lies spread at his feet. From it he can espy mountains and lakes and rivers, the smoke of distant towns, tilled fields and dense thickets; and here and there a white thread goes wandering, showing the track of some great highway of trade. Here he can study earth and heaven: can watch the procession of the clouds, see tempests gather and disperse. He can note the progress of the seasons, from the first green of spring to yellowing autumn. He can scan the heavens and mark the diurnal progress of the stars, the changes of the moon, the atmosphere's ever-varying pageant. Slowly and painfully he brings stones together

and builds himself a tower ; and from its summit he can descry the blue of the distant ocean and the masts of tall ships. The others may make merry at his expense ; but he, when he mounts the tower and gazes forth upon all the wonders lying outspread around him, knows well that he would not exchange his knowledge for a hundred times the worth of all the crops they spend laborious days and years in extracting from the soil, with no eye to aught beyond. He is poor, as they count wealth ; but he has found a thing the measure whereof cannot be computed in silver and gold."

Here is his summary, written evidently towards the final stage of our discussion:

"Our argument is drawing to an end. It is time to attempt to cast the balance and close our books—and it is easy : for all the questions are answered. Let us trace them back one by one—

"Freedom, we saw, in its highest form, to be attainable only in self-realisation ; and the highest self-realisation lay in rendering to the community some distinctive service that no one else could render.

"Then we turned to enquire into the characteristics of our age, seeking for light upon its special needs. We found a predominance of the material, the utilitarian, what Shelley calls 'the owl-like faculty of calculation' ; a corresponding lack of

everything in which imagination is concerned. Any influence to be cast into this scale of the balance must therefore prove acceptable. One, then, whose aim was the spread of Art, Philosophy and Knowledge could not but pass free of the test as rendering, in intention at least, a service to the community of which it stood in need. Whether thereby he attained to self-realisation, and what amount of success was required to give his services a direct social character, were questions that we saw he alone could answer, and answer only without the support of evidence. Certain it is that the prime movers must ever be the great creative minds; but equally, that there is urgent need of a rank and file to form the army of which these are the Generals.

"We have found that there was not only room, but actual need, for the mediocre artist. Nature is notoriously a spendthrift; she wastes a thousand germs to produce a perfect specimen; and even Art cannot claim immunity from the general law.

"We have found, too, the need of an atmosphere—a forcing-house for the tender plants of nascent art; and this only those endowed with some artistic insight could provide.

"Whether it was Philosophy or Art or Knowledge to which our scrutiny was directed, we saw that each in turn proved to subserve the same

end ; namely the diffusion of atmosphere about the outlines of an existence else commonly crude and sordid. The more the understanding of any or all of these could be developed, the better we saw it to be for the world : for their possession meant a truer scale of values, a spiritual background, a livelier imagination, wider sympathies and a far extension of horizon."

The following is the passage with which the note-book ends :

"There must be a factor common to this trinity for which, singly and together, we make so large a claim. What is it in fact but the spirit of Poetry? The very word, in the Greek, sprang from the verb which meant to 'make'; and it is hardly fantastic to find therein a profound symbolism. For poetry is the sole creator. It arrests the fleeting and evanescent and gives it permanent form. Whether it choose as its medium Art or Philosophy or Knowledge, its effect is equally, to quote Hegel, 'to liberate the real import of appearances from the semblance and deception of this bad and fleeting world, and impart to phenomenal semblances a higher reality, born of mind.'

"It is the winged, invisible messenger of the gods, ever-present at the conflict between higher and lower in man's nature, and swift to interpose



a bright spear when the latter presses on too hotly. It casts a shimmering mantle, spun of finest gossamer, like the blue haze of the past, upon crude and unseemly facts. It is a magician wielding a transforming wand.

“It is poetry, in the wider sense, that first lifts man up into the dignity of self-consciousness ; for it shows him to himself, as in a mirror. He can stand aloof and contemplate his own image, and measure, in comparison with it, the inadequacy or distortion of his conceptions. This was doubtless their meaning when the Greeks spoke of the purification of the passions by Art.

“The mere fact that Art removes its representations, as it were, to a distance, softens the brutality of primitive nature. Even the portrayal of ugliness and vice, in setting up a picture before the mind’s eye, makes man aware of what he actually is, and thereby removes him a step further from it. Yet poetry, let us never forget, has no moral purpose ; it is concerned only with truth, and the nearer it approaches truth the more does beauty result.

“He into whom the spirit of Poetry has entered holds in his hands a talisman before which the secrets of space are yielded up and the pages of time roll backward. He may traverse at a flash the unmeasured aeons of existence, and brooding with

the Creator above the deep, see earth lying without form and void, ere as yet light is divided from darkness; may watch the gathering of the waters into one place and the long unwearied days of creation grow one by one to completion. He may walk with Adam and Eve in the garden, and behold their children increase and multiply upon the earth. He may follow the chosen people in their wanderings until they enter into the inheritance of the promised land.

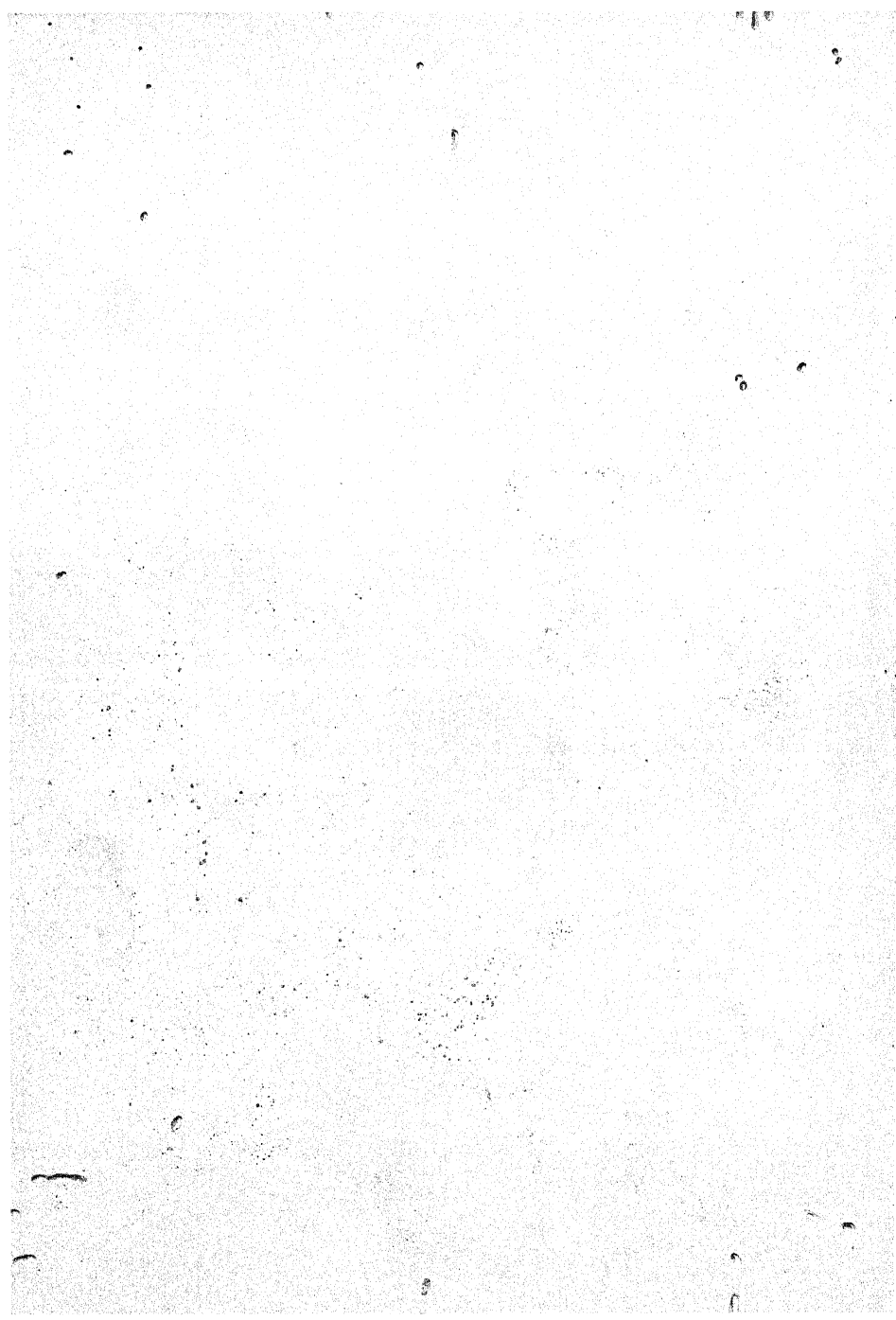
"Anon, turning his gaze upon the heathen, he may observe the dynasties of their gods wax and wane; listen to the thunder dying away to silence on Olympus, and see the eternal twilight gather about Valhalla. From the walls of Troy he may look down upon the death of Hector; or swimming ashore with Odysseus, watch the sport of Nausicaa with her maidens.

"The magic wand will call up for him whatever company he needs to suit his mood; now the grave discourse of seers and philosophers, anon the merriment of jesters, or the bright glances of women. He will sit at the feet of Socrates or laugh his full with Rabelais,—make trial of wits with Rosalind, or sigh for a smile from Helen. It will be given him to fathom the depths of the human soul; to see the canker at the heart of pleasure, and discern the meaning that lies behind

the effigies of suffering and grief. For the doors of Heaven and Hell will be open to him.

“His to evoke at will full midsummer or early spring, the mystery of moonlight nights, the sweetness of the first violet ; to hear the morning stars sing together, and all the Sons of God shout for joy. He will be one with earth and air and water ; will know the secrets of the trees and flowers, and ride with birds and insects upon the air.

“His it will be to wing his way into the trackless future and see man’s destiny coming to its fulness like a tale that is told ; watch the waning of stars and the cataclysm of solar systems ; and whirling among scattered atoms in space, make ready again to enter upon a fresh pilgrimage, and combine anew with the spirit of life in any of its myriad forms.”



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